PETRUS BOREL

MADAME PUTIPHAR

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by

Petrus Borel

Translation 2026.
by
Claude AI (Anthropic)
in collaboration with
Marko Prekić Kentera

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Translated from the French
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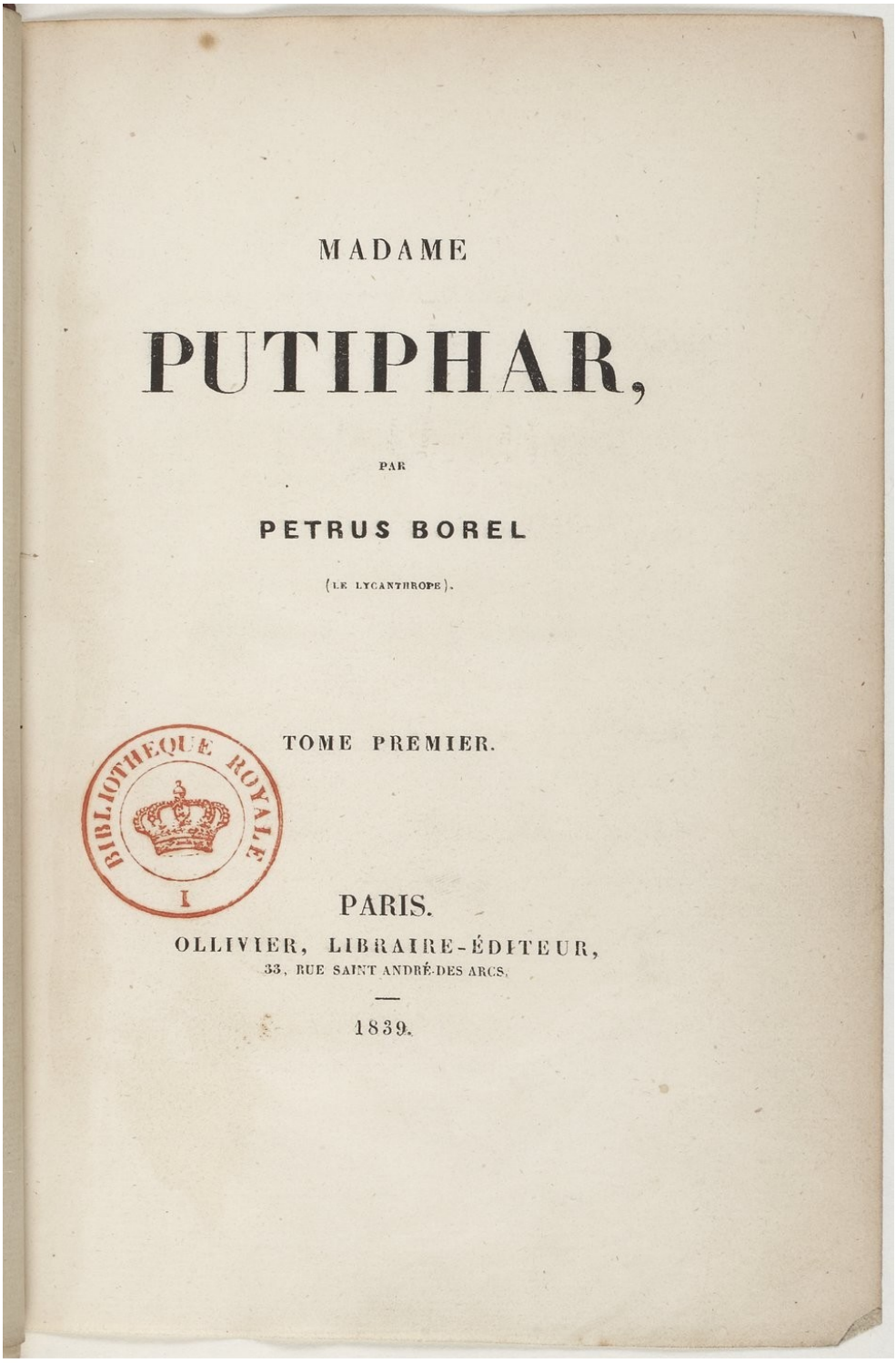
First English Translation

This translation is based on the second French edition of *Madame Putiphar* by Petrus Borel, published in Paris by Léon Willem in 1877. As stated on the title page of that edition, the text and vignettes are faithful to the original 1839 first edition. The 1877 edition also includes a preface by Jules Clarétie. The first edition was originally published in two volumes in 1839.

Pétrus Borel, etching by Célestin Nanteuil
After a painting by Louis Boulanger,
exhibited at the Salon of 1839.


MADAME

PUTIPHAR,

PAR

PETRUS BOREL

(LE LYCANTHROPE).

TOME PREMIER.

BIBLIOTHEQUE ROYALE
I

PARIS.
OLLIVIER, LIBRAIRE-ÉDITEUR,
33, RUE SAINT ANDRÉ-DES ARCS.

1839.

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First edition title page — *Madame Putiphar.*
Paris, Ollivier, 1839.
Source: gallica.bnf.fr / BnF.

PREFACE.

I have long intended to produce, for a handful of curious, original and eccentric figures of our own time, a study in the manner of that which a scholar of distinguished breeding, M. Monselet, brought to successful completion on the Forgotten and Disdained of the eighteenth century. I had opened this altogether singular gallery with the portrait of the Lycanthrope, and I shall not promise that I am done with it; I may well return to it ere long, in pursuit of those unrecognised or outlandish spirits who go by the names of Elim Metscherski, Charles Lassailly, Aloïsius Bertrand, and, nearer to our own day, that poet of rare talent and so adventurous an existence, Albert Glatigny.

For the present, the matter in hand is simply a preface to one of the most singular books of that literary kind which

Nodier christened the *genre frénétique*. For all that concerns the life of Petrus Borel himself, I shall refer the reader to the small volume I devoted to him [1] and shall concern myself here with the work alone — a work which an artist among publishers, M. Léon Willem, aided by the filial devotion of M. Borel d'Hauterive, Petrus's brother, is now restoring to the light in a form more worthy of the bibliophile's attention.

The first edition of *Madame Putiphar* dates from 1839; it fills two octavo volumes in blue wrappers (Paris, Ollivier, publisher), adorned with two woodcut engravings, both reproduced here: the first, fronting Volume I, depicting Patrick with a volume of J.-J. Rousseau in his hand, holding his own against Madame de Pompadour; the second (Volume II), signed Louis Boulanger, showing Deborah on her knees, her hair dishevelled, before a gaunt, half-naked Patrick with a crucifix on his breast. On the cover, a clockface without hands, two bones crossed beneath it, and a single tear.

Petrus Borel had written this book far from Paris, at Le Baizil in Champagne, near the Château de Montmort, during one of those seasons in his life when he felt himself driven towards creation, seized by the fever of it. He had promised two or three further novels to his publisher Ollivier; he had composed at the same period a drama in five acts, *Le Comte Alarcos*, still unprinted, and perhaps destined for the light one day. The harshness of his publisher made short work of that fit of hope and faith.

In a letter auctioned at the sale of autographs from the collection of the publisher Renduel, Petrus Borel complained bitterly of the man who had bought *Madame Putiphar* from him. The letter is pitiless and well worth quoting; it shows us what condition the Lycanthrope was in at the time. "I write to you from my desert," says Petrus Borel. "I sold my two volumes of *Madame Putiphar* to Ollivier for 200 francs, and he refuses me the third instalment — fifty francs — when the whole of the copy is delivered. My misery is dreadful: I am obliged to quit my cave at Bas-Baizil and glean my food from the countryside. Rid me of this man."

As one can see, the Lycanthrope did not suffer from imaginary ills alone; he was perfectly entitled to complain.

Copies of this first edition of *Madame Putiphar* have become, like those of the *Rhapsodies* and *Champavert*, rarities over which collectors of Romantic literature quarrel fiercely. Such is the singular fate of books. It was in the Library, where they had lain for five-and-twenty years, that I found the two volumes of *Madame Putiphar*. Five-and-twenty years they had slept there, unread, uncut, untouched. I was the first to draw an ivory paper-knife between those leaves which no hand had ever turned. And yet the volume deserved study — if only for the verse prologue that precedes the novel, a superb portico to a strange edifice. That introduction is assuredly the most remarkable thing Petrus Borel ever committed to paper.

Its mournful tone is genuinely moving, and for once the gnashing of teeth that marks *Champavert* has ceased. Hesitant now rather than enraged, unsettled, troubled, the poet interrogates himself, turns this way and that, surrenders to doubt, to his various instincts, to that triple nature which makes up his whole idiosyncrasy. We all carry at the bottom of our hearts two or three of those fantastical horsemen of whom Borel speaks, glimpsed in troubled hours like visions out of the Apocalypse.

Need we analyse at length this singular novel, with its eloquent verse prelude? At the opening of the book, my lord and my lady Cockermouth are leaning upon their balcony, watching the sun go down. My lady scatters her wit about her with ill-timed liberality, as her husband roundly tells her; she compares the three long, lustrous clouds to the three horizontal golden bars of the Cockermouth arms, and the sun in a blue sky to the gold bezant on the azure field of the water. My lord drops this sentimental conversation. Freshly returned from the Indies, he demands of his wife, with some severity, why a certain farmer's son, Patrick Fitz-Whyte, is "studying the polite arts with Deborah, the heiress of the Cockermouths." Not only is this Patrick a country lout, he is a Catholic to boot, and Lord Cockermouth's favourite oath is: *"Ventre de papiste!"* He does not trifle with his convictions. The mother defends her daughter as best she can, though she is not herself fully persuaded of Deborah's innocence. What is

to be done? She questions the girl. "Deborah, my child, have you been engaged in nocturnal commerce?" Deborah blushes, falls to her knees and pleads for mercy. She is in love with Mr Patrick Fitz-Whyte (she calls him *monsieur*); every night she slips out through the postern of the East Tower and goes to talk with him near the Hollow Willow — to *talk*, nothing more. "Our conversations have never been other than edifying!" She promises, moreover, to break off all intercourse with this Patrick and to wed whoever her father shall put before her.

But what of it! Miss Deborah is of the faith of Agnès. That very evening she quits the Tower by the postern, makes her way to the Hollow Willow, and calls out the customary password:

"To be!

— *Or no to be!"* answers Patrick, who has read his Shakespeare.

The two lovers quickly exchange their confidences. Both have suffered at the hands of their respective tyrants: Patrick's face is scarred, Deborah's shoulder dislocated. Lord Cockermouth broke his riding-crop across the young man's brow, saluting him with a single word — *"Pig!"* — and hurled a pewter pot at his daughter over the breakfast table. Clearly this cannot go on. The lovers agree they will flee — to France, to live there in freedom and happiness. Their escape is

fixed for "the 15th of the present month," the day of Lord Cockermouth's name-day celebrations.

Alas, one does not quit the paternal manor with impunity. Our turtle-doves are watched. A certain Chris, who nurses a grievance against Patrick for once refusing to drink with him, spies upon them and carries the news to Lord Cockermouth. On the appointed evening, while his guests are at their dessert, Cockermouth and his accomplice, armed to the teeth, make for the Hollow Willow, throw themselves upon a shadow they see lurking there — which must be Patrick — and cut its throat.

Cockermouth then wipes his sword and returns to the banqueting hall. He looks about for Deborah, cannot find her, grows uneasy. They run to the apartments.

"My commodore," says Chris, *"I cannot find mademoiselle!"*

The reader will have guessed that it is not Patrick but Déborah they have murdered. Patrick discovers her lying in her blood, raises her up, and leads her back to the castle. They agree that he shall flee at once and she follow when her wounds are healed. "But," she asks, "how shall I find you in Paris?" This Patrick is resourceful! "We must resort to some expedient... (He is the one speaking.) On the façade of the Louvre that overlooks the Seine, near the sixth pilaster, I shall inscribe my name and address on one of the stones of the wall."

After such an inspiration, an embrace is perfectly in order — and they are careful not to omit it. Then they part.

That done, Deborah presents herself to her father's guests, pale and blood-stained like another Inès de las Sierras. The guests rise and withdraw. Lord Cockermouth tries to detain them, then threatens them with his sword — with his *flamberge*, I should say — and brandishes it over his company. But an old man, stepping towards him, "with a vague air of mystery, says to him: My lord, there is blood upon your sword!"

Book I closes upon this stroke of theatre. It contains, in addition to certain peculiarities of style — such as the singular phrase employed to express Deborah's drinking a glass of water: "She cast a little water on the fire of her breast" — one passage above all deserving of notice: the portrait of Lord Cockermouth, drawn manifestly from life-studies of Sir John Falstaff. The reader will seek it out and find it in these pages; it is an excellent caricature, and Daumier himself could not have sketched it with a surer hand. *Madame Putiphar* abounds in such happy strokes. I shall not pursue the remainder of the story as closely as I have the opening. The reader holds the book in his hands in any case; he may very well leave the prefacer behind and run ahead to the storyteller. Petrus will make himself known perfectly well without assistance. One notes, in passing, the Lycanthrope's fantastical orthography — he clung to his private systems as

doggedly as that other original, Restif de la Bretonne, writing *abyme*, *gryllon*, *pharamineux*, and so forth. "I cannot imagine, without a sympathetic pang," wrote M. Charles Baudelaire, "all the wearisome battles which, in order to realise his typographical dream, the author must have fought with the compositors charged with setting his manuscript."

But let us return to *Madame Putiphar*. Patrick has quit Ireland as agreed, and arriving in France, enlists forthwith in the regiment of the King's Musketeers. He does not forget the sixth pilaster of the Louvre and duly inscribes his address upon it — a wise precaution, since Deborah is already in search of him. She finds him. Their rapturous reunion fills fifteen pages. Petrus Borel could find no better means of expressing their transports than to send them kneeling through every church in Paris. But mark the irony of fate! Patrick has been tried in Ireland in his absence for the murder of Miss Deborah — tried, which is as good as condemned, and better still, since he has been hanged in effigy; a circumstance of which, for his part, he is magnificently contemptuous.

How wrong you are to be contemptuous, friend Patrick! As luck will have it, a musketeer of his regiment, an Irishman like himself — Fitz-Harris — hears news of this hanging and immediately imparts the secret to every one of his comrades. Patrick defends himself as best he can, protests his innocence, and to prove that he did not kill Miss Cockermouth, presents

to his companions Deborah herself — Deborah alive and now his wife. All bow deeply, and all would be for the best — save that the regiment of Musketeers has a colonel. It has one, *vertubleu!* dressed from head to foot in tender green, *têtebleu!* by name the Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, *mille cornettes!* This colonel is in love with Patrick's wife. He would seduce her: she will not hear of it. He would abduct her: she repulses him. He places Patrick under arrest the better to press his suit with Deborah — but Deborah resists. He has threats; she has pistols.

Meanwhile, Fitz-Harris, the Irishman who is a poet by fits and starts, is convicted of publishing a libel against Madame Putiphar — read: Madame de Pompadour. Petrus Borel also calls Louis XV Pharaoh. Master Fitz-Harris is sent to the Bastille, and Patrick, ever generous, goes to the Marquise to plead for his release.

Here I am sorely tempted to take Petrus Borel to task for his excessive severity towards this queen of the left hand, who turned her demi-royalty to some account in the way of doing good, at a court where others, by habit and temperament, did abundant harm. God preserve me from being swept along by that current of erotic rehabilitations which, having set out from Agnès Sorel, has not paused at the Du Barry! But when I call Madame de Pompadour to mind, it is at her *petit lever* that I see her: smiling, surrounded by artists who were her friends, holding the engraving-tool and consulting Boucher

upon the print she has just completed. Muse of the Rococo, she was not content merely to publish prints or paint rosy-breasted nymphs; she protected the Encyclopédistes — and that small, surprisingly powerful hand was perhaps the only one capable of staying the persecution. She philosophised; she did something towards expelling the Jesuits. In short, much shall be forgiven her, for she loved, however lightly, the freedom of art and of thought [2].

But Petrus Borel gives us no such picture. In his pages she is a famished she-wolf, a Cleopatra past her best, and when Madame du Hausset ushers Patrick into the boudoir at Choisy-le-Roi, the Putiphar seizes with both hands — and what hands! — the cloak of this Irish Joseph. This incorrigible Patrick resists, however, with considerable spirit. She speaks of love, seduction, intoxication; he answers with the Irish tongue, with Dryden, with minstrels, with the legends of his native land. To this frantic and inflamed woman he retorts with a lecture in comparative grammar, and when she declares her passion to his face, he walks composedly to the library, takes down a volume by the Citizen of Geneva, and places before Pompadour's eyes this sentence from *La Nouvelle Héloïse*:

"The wife of a coalman is more estimable than the mistress of a king."

Pompadour makes no answer; but she has my Patrick sent to the Bastille, while the colonel, the Marquis de

Villepastour, has Deborah conveyed to the Parc-aux-Cerfs. If Patrick is a wolf, however, Deborah is a lioness. Let Pharaoh pray, implore, prostrate himself at her feet — she resists; she is magnificent. "You will end," says the king, "by making me brutal!" Volume I of *Madame Putiphar* closes upon the struggle and the final resistance of Deborah.

In Volume II, Petrus Borel sows with prodigal hand the whole melodramatic wardrobe: dark dungeons, dripping staircases, savage gaolers, blood-stained underground passages and oubliettes, the full phantasmagoria of the genre. Deborah is imprisoned in Fort Sainte-Marguerite and contrives to escape. Patrick and Fitz-Harris, thrown together by chance, rot in underground cells, at the Bastille or at Vincennes. And yet, for all this machinery, there are pages here that are genuinely arresting and terrible. The long hours of the two martyrs are measured out with a sombre cruelty that begins by making one smile and ends by making one shudder. That scene in which Fitz-Harris dies cursing his tormentors, in which delirium takes hold of him, in which he sees in dying ecstasy his County Kerry, proud Killarney, the sunlight, the trees, the birds; in which Patrick is presently left alone in the dark with his friend's corpse — that scene grips you by the throat like a gag. Petrus takes what seems a fierce, deliberate pleasure in disquieting and tormenting the reader.

As for the end of the story, here it is. Deborah has borne Patrick's son. She has named him Vengeance. He is a

desperado of the familiar stamp — cut after the pattern of Antony, or of Didier, one of the thousand casts taken from the statues of the Romantic bastards. Deborah, goaded by her son's lamentations, confides to him the secret of his birth, shows him his father imprisoned, tortured and accursed, and puts a sword in his hand with the words: "Go avenge him!" Vengeance descends upon Villepastour's house, insults him, strikes him in the face, compels him to fight. The Marquis draws his sword, dispatches this rash young man with a single straight thrust, has the body strapped to the horse that brought Vengeance alive to his door, and releases the new Mazeppa across the fields. The nocturnal ride of Vengeance's horse towards the castle where Deborah waits is one of the finest passages in the book — a kind of ballad in which, like a repeated refrain, the author's cry to the coursing animal rings out: *"Go swiftly, my horse, go swiftly!"*

When Deborah sees her son dead, she feels her heart crack, life ebb, doubt overwhelm her. She despairs of God, having already despaired of men.

Here the pen seems to fall abruptly from Borel's hands. An accent of poignant sincerity breaks through his narrative, and the final answer delivered to his own novel — justice flooding back into this den of horrors, the good taking their revenge upon the wicked — is the taking of the Bastille by the people, the overthrow of the throne by the faubourgs, the murder of the past by liberty. Petrus Borel succeeds here in

painting in vivid colours, and from an unexpected angle, the triumphant episodes of the fourteenth of July. His pen quickens, runs, flashes, curses, exults, sweeps all before it; his prose smells of powder. There are pages here truly worthy of those incandescent writers who lived in the very furnace — yes, worthy of Loustalot or Camille Desmoulins.

At the bottom of a well, in the mud and the darkness, the people discover at last an old man babbling words in an unknown tongue. It is Patrick — Patrick gaunt, skeletal, gone from the world. Deborah recognises him; she throws herself upon his neck, speaks to him, calls him by his name. He does not hear. "Mad!" she cries. "He is mad!..." She draws back in terror, falls her full length upon the ground and dies.

The book stops. One more murder would have been too much.

I have just named Camille Desmoulins; and it is not merely the style of Camille that the dénouement of *Madame Putiphar* calls to mind — the very idea of the novel was furnished to the Lycanthrope by history. Petrus Borel (this will be of interest to the curious) lifted his book from Camille Desmoulins's *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*. In No. 40 of the *Révolutions* [3], page 34, I find a letter from one Macdonagh, an Irish gentleman and captain, who complains of having been persecuted and offended by his colonel and thrown into prison — not the Bastille, but the tower on the islands of Sainte-Marguerite — in a manner that precisely

anticipates the story of the Irishman Patrick in *Madame Putiphar*, who is offended by his colonel, persecuted and flung into a dungeon. The character is the same; the adventure identical. The colonel carries off the wife — who is called Deborah in the novel, Rose Plunkett in the historical record.

Macdonagh's letter to Desmoulins is dated 15 July 1790. He recounts how Rose Plunkett, whom he had married in Ireland and who was taken from him while he lay in the dungeon of the Man in the Iron Mask, is today the wife of the Marquis de Carondelet. The Marquis lost no time in writing to Camille: "Sir, how astonished I was to see in your journal a letter signed Macdonagh, containing an infamous story about my wife, of which there is not a single word of truth! This man has barely glimpsed her through the grilles of a convent, &c., &c." To which Desmoulins replies that he does not repent of having published the Irishman's letter, for publicity is the safeguard of the people and of honest men. "A denunciation," he says, "if it is true, unmasks rogues; if it is false, unmasks a calumniator; in either case it turns to the profit of society, and does no harm to its subject, for what injury does a fabrication do you of which it is so easy to confound the author and make him bear the penalty?"

There was considerable uproar in the wake of Macdonagh's letter, and the Marquis de Carondelet, Knight of Saint-Louis, had immediately addressed against "the intriguer" a petition to the gentlemen of the National Assembly, to the

King, to his ministers, to every tribunal in the kingdom: "He is a scoundrel weaving his own noose," it declared of Macdonagh. Macdonagh's answer was to call on Camille Desmoulins and tell him the whole affair, which is an atrocious one. Macdonagh, says the author of the *Révolutions de France et de Brabant*, had married Rose Plunkett; Rose, having vainly offered him a sum of money to purchase his withdrawal, "found," in Desmoulins's words, "that it would cost her considerably less to divorce him by *lettre de cachet*, and for 24,000 livres, had her husband imprisoned — not her future, but her former husband — on the islands of Sainte-Marguerite for twelve years and seven months." And, as supporting documents, Desmoulins inserts in his journal letters from the Marquise de Carondelet in which Rose Plunkett addresses the Irish captain as "My heart and my soul."

What became of the Macdonagh affair one might pursue at leisure; what is certain is that Petrus Borel found in it the subject of *Madame Putiphar*, and that, reshaping the role of Rose into Deborah, enriching his story with a visit to Pompadour and a storming of the Bastille, he chose, on that day, Camille Desmoulins for his collaborator.

The public will be glad, I have no doubt, to encounter again, in an edition made for select libraries, a book as celebrated and as characteristic as *Madame Putiphar*.

He who wrote it was a man of conviction and of talent who might have left a still deeper mark on the history of letters had fortune been less deaf to his appeals. How greatly he dreamed! I find in the files of *L'Artiste* these lines, never since reprinted, which show plainly what his hopes and visions were:

9 October.

Tout ce que vous voudrez pour vous donner la preuve
De l'amour fort et fier que je vous dois vouer;
Pas de noviciat, pas d'âpre et dure épreuve
Que mon cœur valeureux puisse désavouer.

Oui, je veux accomplir une œuvre grande et neuve!
Oui, pour vous mériter, je m'en vais dénouer
Dans mon âme tragique et que le fiel abreuve
Quelque admirable drame où vous voudrez jouer!

Shakspeare applaudira; mon bon maître Corneille
Me sourira du fond de son sacré tombeau!
Mais quand l'humble ouvrier aura fini sa veille,

Éteint sa forge en feu, quitté son escabeau,
Croisant ses bras lassés de son œuvre exemplaire,
Implacable, il viendra réclamer le salaire!

PETRUS BOREL.

[Whatever it may cost me, to give you proof of the strong and proud love I owe you; no novitiate, no bitter ordeal that my valiant heart need be ashamed to own. Yes, I mean to accomplish a great and new work! Yes, to make myself worthy of you, I shall go and unseal, within my tragic soul soaked through with gall, some admirable drama in which you shall choose to play! Shakespeare will applaud; my good master Corneille will smile upon me from the depths of his sacred tomb! But when the humble workman has finished his night-vigil, quenched his blazing forge, left his workbench, and crossed his arms weary from their exemplary labour — implacable, he will come to claim his wages!]

This sonnet was addressed to Madame Paradol, the beautiful Madame Paradol of the Comédie-Française, mother of Prévost-Paradol; to her also Petrus dedicated the novel which M. Willem is today reprinting. The verses betray a proud and strenuous spirit, a courage fully braced to attempt great things, an immense hunger to scale the heights. These follies and these valiant ardours, these eruptions and smouldering fires of Romanticism, were worth more, take them altogether, than the slough of Realism, at which the world will smile just as readily when its moment has passed — a movement which belongs, in its own way, no less to Nodier's *genre frénétique*.

On the subject of Romanticism and its fevers, M. Philarète Chasles once wrote: "It was a fine, frenzied epoch. It wanted too much, hoped too much, trusted too much in its own strength, flung too much of its sap to the winds of south and north. It did not pause to listen to itself living; but it *lived*. It had ardour, sap, momentum. Singular characters and phenomena at every turn: emancipated women, phalansterians, Vintrassians, Saint-Simonians; men were writing dramas in thirty acts and verse-lines of forty feet. *Trialph* sprang from the pen of Lassailly, and poor Petrus Borel, who went to die of grief in Algeria, declared himself a lycanthrope. People imagined that a single law duly voted might open paradise upon earth; that one noble speech from the tribune might reverberate in every breast...." Ah, the fine time! the time of glorious chimeras! Was it folly? Perhaps. But we have grown too wise. We analyse, criticise, sift and probe on all sides; we are chemists, physicians, yes — but we are no longer creators. Imagination has deserted us. The madwoman of the house has slipped away without a word. What remains to us is a breed of narrators who describe — part genre-painters, part auctioneers' assessors. We no longer possess geniuses who invent. And there was assuredly more saltpetre in the least of those former madmen than in more than one celebrated personage of today.

And that is why we too, as we leaf through the feverish pages of the Lycanthrope, find ourselves saying: *"Poor Yorick, alas! — Hélas! pauvre Yorick!"*

There was something there.

February 1877.

Jules CLARETIE.

NOTES

[1] *Petrus Borel le Lycanthrope, sa Vie et ses Œuvres*, published by René Pincebourde (Bibliothèque Originale, 1865).

[2] A collection of autograph letters by celebrated women of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was sold quite recently (February 1877) at the Hôtel Drouot, among which figured a series of letters by Madame de Pompadour that might well give rise to a most interesting publication. These are letters from Antoinette Poisson to her father (1741 to 1753), and to her brother M. de Vendières, marquis de Marigny (1749 to 1762). In them we see Madame de Pompadour performing *Alzire* at her theatre at Choisy, sitting to Boucher for her portrait and to Liotard for her pastel likeness; speaking of her dear little Cochin (Charles Cochin, the draughtsman), of the paintings of Joseph Vernet, of the madness of the painter La Tour. She addresses M. de Vendières as *frérot* — little brother — or as Monseigneur de Marcassin, declining the name after the Latin fashion, while bestowing upon herself the pet name of Reinette. Reinette — does that not mean little queen, O Marquise? Be that as it may, these thirty-nine letters, running to some sixty pages in all, compose a piquant, lively, and most charming chronicle of times past, in which Madame de Pompadour shows herself thoroughly amiable and singularly attractive. (See the catalogue of this sale, compiled by M. Gabriel Charavay.) Such is all that remains of that precious collection from a private cabinet, which had also included Louise de la Fayette, the duchesse de la Châtre, Marie de Hautefort, the princesse de Conti, the duchesse de Portsmouth, and others besides — a very Academy of women, the *Decameron* of history.

[3] See our study on Camille Desmoulins, Lucile Desmoulins et les Dantonistes (1 vol. in-8vo, Plon, 1872).

[4] A deft piece of flattery: Madame Putiphar was at that time two-and-forty years of age.

MADAME PUTIPHAR

A coalman's wife is more estimable than the mistress of a King.

A

L. P.

CE LIVRE

EST A TOI ET POUR TOI

MON AMIE.

Author's dedication:

To
L. P.
This book
is yours and for you,
my friend.

PROLOGUE.

One sorrow is reborn as another fades;
When one grief gutters out, a new grief has unfurled;
Life is a briar that blooms in the tears it has made.

Within my sombre breast, as in a tilting-yard,
Three horsemen dash and clash and will not be at peace,
And these three horsemen, to my very self attached,
Contend for what I am; beneath the axe of each
My nature groans aloud — yet on these maddened three
My cries fall as the drums and brazen trumpets fall
Upon the weariest soldier, till in savage glee
He hurls himself, laughing, through the leaden squall,
His heart drunk with the rage and clamour of the fray.

The first is young and fresh, alert in every limb;
He wears with easy grace a corselet of steel
That glitters through a net of green encompassing him
As glacier glints through the pine-trees' dark reveal.
His eye is amorous; his handsome golden head
Is helmeted and plumed with mantling richly wrought,
Whose heavy crest envelops him in floods outspread

As lampas-silk enwraps a swaying palanquin.
His Andalusian horse shakes out its streaming plume
And caracoles beneath its stirrups wrought of gold,
While dagger-flash and buckler-blaze light up the gloom
With all the nimbleness of some vain toreador.

The second horseman, like a reliquary raised,
Sits gravely perched upon a mule's declining back —
A mule that would have set some Gothic scholar crazed,
For on its bony spine, that angular knuckled rack,
A faded housing has been carefully bestowed:
A housing that once draped some ancient chancel-stool,
Or decked the snow-white palfrey prancing down the road
On which Isabeau of Bavaria made her rule.
He's stout and fat and wheezing; his cadaverous mount
Beneath him seems to crack and lean towards the vale:
A walking antithesis — a jest to recount —
Of Shrovetide riding out with Carnival in trail!
For he's a penitent, a cowled and cassocked friar,
Entombed within his trailing habit, veiled in hood,
Who hides from earth below to sell himself the higher —
Beatifically astride his rectitude.
But Sabaoth inspires him: he rages, swears, and sweats,
And hurls at both his rivals challenges of pride
Well bolstered by a mace whose weight no man forgets:
He's stained with blood, and kisses Christ the Crucified.

Now for the third: a man of stone is he entire,
Who seems the dread Commendatore, foul and dark —
A Hyperborean gnome whose lidless eyes are fire,
Whose hollow skull rings out, pupil-less, blank, and stark,
Like some despoilèd tomb struck by a passing blade.
He bears a scythe whose steel weeps blood in streaming red;
Behind his saddle hangs a caltrop, grimly laid,
From which there rots and grins a gallows-ripened dead —
Foul gibbet-game! And last, for scimitar he wears,
Swung heavy at his flank, an iron hook of vast

Proportions, threaded through with nets that trail their wares
Of earth-born grubs and carrion worms — his angler's cast.

The first combatant, he the fairest — he's the World!
Who crowns my head with flowers to draw me to his side,
And when the road is foul, his cloak beneath me furled,
He lays it for my steps, then dries the tears I've cried.
He'd have me follow him — he'd have me wholly yield
My self to him, without remorse or second thought,
And plunge into his breast and, on that crimson field
Of wave, be rocked to sleep, surrendered, gladly caught.
He is the joyous World, that smiling effigy,
Who flings before my youth, on both its leaves thrown wide,
The garden of the future, full of sorcery,
Where all my glorious days blaze forth in splendid pride.
Ineffable horizon! Starry sky above!
He is the clamorous World, with all its passions here,
Its veiled and lovely loves, its shameless ugly love,
Its thousand luxuries, its harlotries laid bare!
The World, its balls, its nights, its gaming-rooms, its dames,
Its feasts, its steeds, its sumptuous and groaning boards,
Where simple folk are base and wretchedness defames!
Where he who revels most the highest praise affords!
The World, its vast and shining cities, blazing bright,
Its Orient, its brigs upon the rolling main,
Its reputations thundering through the world's delight,
Its deathless heroes and its conquerors' proud refrain,
Its poets — very gods! — whose works strewn on the way
The drunken nations kiss with rapture as they pass,
Its temples, palaces, its royalties' display,
Its clash of steps, of voices, hands upon the glass!
The World! He speaks to me: "Come with me now, young man;
Put all your trust in me — I'll sate your each desire.
However vast they be, I'll pay you all I can!
You want for glory? Here! Take pleasures? I'll set fire
To men with them — and so to you! Those women, too,
Whose sight alone drives senses mad — they shall be thine,

And on their wanton flesh your passions, ever new,
You'll whet as on a stone, and sharpen by design!"

The second combatant — he of the solemn mien,
The mild and benign air, whose face compunction shades —
He is the Solitude, the Desert, wastes unseen;
He is the Cloister, where the Lord's devotion wades
In torrents down, where dews of silence and of calm
Transform the bitter gall to sweetness, where the soul
Is bathed in ceaseless light and steeped in holy balm:
The mountain where the Christian speaks with God, made whole!
The Cloister! And he says: "Ascend to me, young man;
Put all your trust in me. Forsake a world that lies,
Where all things fade away as when the dreamer's plan
Dissolves with morning's light. Go — if you would be wise,
The one redeemer of our miseries below
Is this: the monastery, stern, contemplative!
All things on earth are vice and pestilence. And so
Know this: that glory's vain, and what posterity can give
Is but a prideful error, an absurd conceit!
Would you erect, along your road, a monument
That lives? Alas! the world forgets. The years delete
All record, and our life has no day subsequent.
Come, taste with me the stillness of the hermitage;
Leave carnal love, its filth, its gross impurity;
Break free — it is not late. Your soul in its green age
Was never made for such a world; its purity
Demands a faithful keeper. Come! And if in prayer
And meditation you find not enough to drink,
Then you shall descend into the sombre lair
Of holy learning; bend your vigil-pallid brink
Of brow above its sacred crucibles, and raise
The name of Christ — and pour contempt upon the stage
Where Philosophy, that mountebank, displays
Its blasphemies atop its trestle-boards of age.
Or if you choose the beloved study of the arts,
Then worship them within the shadow of this place;

Upon this dome and wall, with all your fervent parts,
A second Bartholomew, Lesueur in grace
Though not in fortune — paint the Bible and paint God!"

The final combatant, that resonant cavalier,
The frigid spectre, gnome with nets and fishing-rod —
It's he I fondle close and secretly revere:
Eternal leveller, implacable of blade,
It's Death, it's Nothingness! In subterranean tone
He calls to me unceasingly: "Child, come to my shade;
Child, plunge into my breast, for Sorrow sits the throne
Of this accursèd earth, and Infamy is king!
Come, descend again; come, plunge back in the mire,
Chrysalis, ephemeron, shadow, wavering!
Come soon, not late; I never weary, never tire —
I harvest one by one the grapes from Mankind's vine.
Before the heavy pestle of all suffering
Has ground your heart to dust, snuff out that flame of thine!
Our Lady of Rejoicing and of Ransoming —
That's Death! The promised Canaan — that's the tomb!
What do you wait for? What's your will? Pay no regard
To that seducing Cloister's tongue — believe the gloom
Of mine instead. You do not know, child, how 'tis hard,
How binding is the Cloister! Rest it swears to give;
It's but a gypsy cheat who lies and wheedles well,
Then casts you in his net! And there a man must live
Still prey to his obsessions. In that desert's spell
There is no calm; at leisure it inflames the fire
Of passions. In the Cloister, heed me well, you suit
No better than the World. Fear its deceitful choir
Of peace; fear Anthony's fell satyrs at the root;
Fear temptation, fear remorse, fear every danger,
The sieges of the flesh, the fallings of the soul.
Beneath the desert wind your longings grow no stranger
But blaze the more; solitude racks and rends the whole,
It grips, it tortures, breaks, enkindles — and your sense
Shall sink to sufferings no tongue has ever told!"

“No happiness is true, no rest is more than pretence,
Save in the grave alone. Upon the earth, the cold
Fares ill; beneath it, well. There, no corroding bliss;
There, no false fellowship; there, no ambition’s sting,
No hope betrayed — just Nothing! Nothingness! The abyss —
An absence, a dead bolt, a sea unsounding,
A void with no echo! Come, I say to you!
At my voice you shall crumble into powder — all,
As Jericho’s high walls before the trumpets blew!”

So, for a weary age, this hellish trio brawl
And hack at one another — three proud bravos, these —
Who’ve seized upon (the villains!) for their battle-hall
My wretched heart, all bruised beneath their batteries;
My wretched, stricken heart, that buckles and is ground —
Doubting, devout, and mad, worldly and miscreant!
When shall the struggle end, and who shall claim the mound
Of me — God knows! — the Desert, World, or Vacant?

BOOK THE FIRST

I.

Whether fate itself is real, I cannot say; but that there are fated lives, of this I am certain. Some human beings are delivered up to misery as their birthright. Some are destined to be devoured by their fellow creatures, tossed to them much as captives were once pitched into the circus to face the tigers. Wherefore?... This I do not know. And wherefore are these selected instead of those — of this also I can give no account. Here does reason wander into darkness, and the understanding that attempts to dig deeper only loses itself.

Providence, if it exists at all, does it watch over the vast machinery of the universe, over the human race entire, whilst leaving the individual to his own devices? For the entire body does it care, but not for the individual member? Are the days to come fixed for each single being in the same manner as

they are fixed for the universe entire? Has Providence placed its sign upon each and every creature? If it indeed designates every being and stands guardian over each, then why should its finger now and then shove them into the void? Why does its care prove at times so ruinous?

Those who profess to know everything, to whom all mysteries are transparent, will inform us that each person's destiny proceeds at once from the structure of his frame; that the unsuspecting soul will forever play the fool, while the astute one will make fools of others and will deftly navigate around the pitfalls that send the first one sprawling. Yet wherefore should one be crafty whilst the other remains guileless? Is there wickedness in being innocent and kind, such wickedness as should be punished with calamity and torture? — Whereupon your philosophers reply: This one is innocent because the region of his brain governing innocence is pronounced; that one is wily because the region governing wiliness bulges forth. — So be it. Yet why should this one have been furnished with an organ denied to that one? By whose authority was this dispensation made? What capricious force assigned to this man the faculty of killing and to that man the faculty of compassion? If this arbitrary power has, from the very instant of conception, apportioned virtue and vice amongst creatures, then it has likewise apportioned their fates: so destinies are fixed from the first; so there is such a

thing as fate! There is, then, no such thing as free agency in the living being: he is granted no capacity to decide whether he shall be meek or ferocious, whether he shall undergo torment or inflict it, whether he shall embrace or slay. — Up will get the philosophers with a fresh response: No passion is inherently virtuous or vicious. It was society, coming after the fact, that made the determination: Here is wickedness, there is virtue. I pronounce a thing good if it serves my interest; I pronounce it bad if it brings me loss. — Let us accept this. But given that men are intended to live amongst their fellows, why does Providence create some who are constitutionally incapable of doing so? Why does it act in opposition to its own end? Are we to conclude that it is capricious and irrational? No Providence worthy of the name could behave thus. Moreover, such an explanation accounts for nothing, for we see men of social disposition who fall prey to the very society they are fitted for; for good men exist whose existence is one of terrible suffering; for we see people destroyed by events utterly independent of their volition, events their understanding was powerless to predict and which no human merit, however great, could have turned aside.

To ward off despair, it is true, we have conjured up the whole apparatus of life to come, wherein the righteous shall receive their reward and the wicked their punishment. But what merit lies in rewarding one who is just, if he has never

faced the choice between virtue and vice? And wherefore visit chastisement upon the evildoer, when no choice between transgression and kindness was ever his to make? We may rightly reward or punish nothing save what is done by choice. Were a creature formed good, we ought to exalt God, not that creature; were one formed wicked, we ought to condemn God, not the wretch who had no hand in his own making. Rather than fashion two existences — one flawed, the other contrived expressly to set right the inequities of the former — might not God have simply made one that was adequate from the beginning?

Should we deem original sin unjust, we must pronounce original predestined fate nothing short of atrocious. Is the law of God, then, inferior to the laws fashioned by mankind? Does it, like some barbarous statute, operate backwards through time?

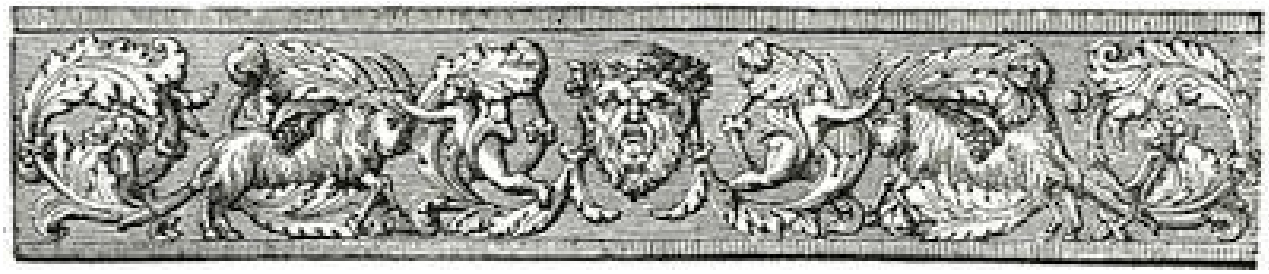
I refuse to occupy myself longer with these fatiguing and abhorrent notions. I will not waste myself attempting to make sense of mysteries that admit of no solution. To persist in such meditations would be to break my skull upon stone. Each time my reason presumes to inquire, I strike it senseless; and I humble myself in the presence of that which cannot be known.

We are frequently told that this or that insect was fashioned by Providence as a plaything for the young: perhaps

we too were made for no other purpose than the casual entertainment of some higher order of existence — beings who derive satisfaction from our torture and grow cheerful at the sound of our cries of pain. Are there not many among us whose lives mirror those of the scarab impaled upon a pin and fastened, yet breathing, to a wall? Or, no less aptly, to those wretched bats pinned living to doorways, where they provide sport for those who would test their skill with the arbalest?

Providence, if such a thing exists, travels by some very curious roads: woe to him who is singled out to tread one of these uncommon roads! Better by far for such a one if he had died unborn.

Should your courage prove equal to the task, it falls to you to probe these matters and arrive at some conclusion. For my own part — humble storyteller that I am — I will do no more than lay before you destinies so hideous that they eclipse all other destinies in horror. Happier by far than I shall you prove yourselves, should you succeed in believing that some Providence sat at the loom of such lives, and should you discern what end and what office such existences were meant to serve.



II.

Come to the balcony, my lord: such a sunset as this! You are fortune's favourite, my lord — ah, indeed you are! The sky itself bends in vassalage, carrying your coat of arms emblazoned on its flank. See there, in the west; those three streaming, luminous clouds— are they not the very image of your three golden fesses set crosswise? And there is the sun — your very own golden bezant —shining against the blue expanse of your heraldic field?"

"You exercise your pretty wit to little purpose, my lady: you would fain, in your accustomed manner, evade a discussion that sits heavy upon you by seizing on some chance occurrence, some charming affectation; but I am not to be caught by such birdlime —you know this — and you shall attend to me till I am done. So I was observing to you that mischief will come upon your daughter if you do not mind what you are about. I observed to you that I had foreseen, even at the commencement, everything that has

happened since, that I divined what any woman in your position should have divined; aye, and which any other woman, holding your maternal office, would have instinctively known. Those who fawn upon you style you naïve; I say you are slow-witted. You know no more of what is seemly than a child just born. By this sword I wear, the only noble thing about you is the name I gave you! Before ever I left these shores for the Indies on that first occasion, having detected in the pair of them a certain budding affection and the opening stages of an entanglement, I impressed upon you with the utmost gravity —indeed, made you promise faithfully — never again to permit any commerce between them; on all points you set my wishes at naught. Then again, as I set out for the field of battle, I gave you the selfsame directive in terms that admitted no ambiguity, and you flouted it with even less ambiguity. Upon my homecoming from the wars, there was Deborah keeping company with Pat; Pat, I found, had almost taken up residence here; Pat shown the consideration you might show to a boy born of your own body; Pat sitting through each of Deborah's instructional hours, learning with her those graceful arts befitting gentlefolk. Were you in your right mind at all! A capital bit of business you have transacted, in truth! A fine turn you have done for Patrick's unfortunate father! The poor man is now quite confounded as to what he should do with his ne'er-do-well offspring, who sets off to the fields bearing a sol-fa book

in one hand and his Shakespeare in the crook of his arm. Even supposing you cared nothing else, simple respect for my name should have prevented you from bringing beneath this roof, and entertaining in such a manner, the son of one of your farm tenants — and him an Irish Papist into the bargain!"

"Dearest spouse, you cannot but know how entirely I submit myself to you in all respects. I meant no defiance of your authority in what I did, but was moved purely by concern for your daughter: left to the company of none but myself and several ill-tempered servants, possessing not the smallest diversion in this beautiful yet mournful, this charming yet deathly quiet estate, the hapless child was slowly dying of listlessness and never stopped begging for the return of her Pat, who gladdened her with his wholesome high spirits, who tempted her outdoors into the garden and through the grounds; who contrived, to gratify his young lady playmate, games and pastimes of every description. Partaking of her games, was it not fitting that he should partake of her lessons too? Would there not have been something harsh in turning him out at the moment Debby's masters came? Seeing that he stood as her companion, should I not have made it my business to teach him and polish his manners that he might better deserve her friendship? The wretched boy had so strong a wish to improve himself, and such quickness of

mind! It kindled in slothful Debby an eagerness to keep pace. Furthermore, as you yourself know, he was so winning in his ways, so soft-spoken, so solicitous! Would that a great many men of rank had heirs to match him!"

"Ever the same parade of liberal sentiments, ever these pretty theories about the inferior sort; argue till you are spent: a mule and a horse of breeding are not the same animal, no more than an Irishman may be called a man. Whither do all these heroic acts of goodness tend? All this charity you lavish upon beggars and the peasantry will see you hamstrung by those vile Papists when first they find the opportunity. Your treatment of the Pat boy — what shall come of it, what has come of it already? Debby and Pat, having been brought up in one another's company, became devoted friends, and friendship has now given way to love; lady Deborah Cockermouth, young as she is, has lost her heart to the son of your tenant: her ladyship would be pleased enough to wed the fellow! May God strike me down! The thought makes my very hair bristle! Her ladyship will have none of the splendid alliances proposed; her ladyship sends packing every well-born applicant who courts her: 'I am sworn to remain chaste,' the creature announces. By a Papist's guts! What manner of Romish nonsense is this? May I be damned! It all goes amiss...."

"Why work yourself into such a passion? Wherefore all this vehemence? This whim about maintaining her maidenhood is nothing but a girlish caprice, which shall vanish when once she has found a gentleman after her own heart. As regards Patrick, surely you know that matters have been finished between the pair of them for ever so long; and that ever since your ferocious tirade directed at him, he has kept well away from the castle."

"*The affair is quite over between them!... He has stayed away from the castle!...* Who gave you such excellent intelligence? You keep too tight a watch, madam; pray moderate it somewhat. Is that so! *All is at an end between the pair?...* your word as a gentlewoman?... Which explains how my trusty Chris has spotted him skulking in the vicinity of the castle time and again; which accounts for his having heard on multiple occasions what should have reached your own ears — Deborah getting up at night, leaving her chamber, and heading down toward the park grounds. You say all is over between them!... do you, in earnest?... Well and good, stay in your peaceful ignorance: as concerns myself, I mean to be doubly harsh; Chris will keep watch on him; and if the devil will have it so, I will take steps that shall be anything but mild with that stuck-up chit of yours.... As to the yokel, he is the easiest matter to dispose of."

"You are the master here, my lord, and most particularly master of what you do; I am no more than your obedient handmaid, and I bow to your will. Have your way; as you sow, so shall you reap."

"Just as you would have it, Countess."

III.

On the morrow, once she had emerged from her chamber refreshed and attired, Lady Cockermouth caused Deborah to be invited to wait upon her. The girl was to steal up by the back staircase, as secretly as could be contrived, so that no notice of it might reach her father.

Young Debby hastened to her mother's chamber, visibly distressed and stealing in with anxious secrecy; fearful yet affectionate, she drew near to embrace her mother, but her kiss fell merely upon the hands that propped up Lady Cockermouth's bowed and troubled head.

"You are good to have come so promptly at my request, mademoiselle," said Lady Cockermouth, revealing at last her grief-stricken features. "If you will but heed my tender and prudent counsel in this manner hereafter, you will do what is right and save us both — yourself and your ill-fated mother — from terrible heartache and from the torments of self-

reproach. How greatly I want for comfort! And there is no comfort to be had for me except what you may give. A single time, Debby, when you were yet a child, did I permit myself to gratify a passing fancy of yours; and that pardonable weakness of a mother's heart has inflicted wounds upon my life that was even then so utterly blighted: you had taken a powerful liking to Pat, young Patrick the farmer's lad; you were perpetually seeking him out, including him in all your diversions, sharing your toys with him, acting towards him as towards a brother born, and sinking into ill-humour whenever they took him away from you. Instead of rejecting your friendship with the little bumpkin as inflexibly as duty required of me — a friendship altogether unbecoming and profoundly injurious to your father's feelings, he having instructed me time and again to end it with an iron hand — that I might not rob you of your sole playmate, that I might spare you grief, I yielded to your importunate pleadings and sanctioned your interviews. I had thought it simply a bit of childish nonsense that would quickly fade, but your tastes revealed themselves to be fixed and enduring. As the years passed I was quite unable to make you see that it was fitting and decent to end your connexion with this rustic youth, now no longer a boy; you could not be brought to acknowledge that you were lowering yourself beneath your proper sphere. Doubtless you remember — even now my heart aches from it — all the tumults this leniency cost me, all the savage anger it

visited upon the two of us; had we not endured enough? I had believed myself purged of guilt, I had believed that conflict spent and done; I had believed that burning coal of dissension stamped out entirely; but have I, wretch that I am, deluded myself utterly? And now behold! Your father's rage has stirred itself anew, burning more fiercely than ever it did: yesterday, asserting that you yet hold commerce with Mr Pat, he inveighed bitterly against you and loaded me with accusations. I tried to soothe his temper by bearing witness, as forcefully as I could, to your guiltlessness. I strove to convince him that someone of ill intent had deliberately imposed upon his credulity. I besought him not to cast such aspersions upon my Deborah. I drove back that poisonous slander as far from us as I could. No, Deborah, you are not the sort of daughter who keeps night-time trysts — it is a lie, a calumny! Shall you give me the lie? No, Deborah, it is impossible you have carried on, imperilling all your prospects, with this inexcusable connexion — a connexion calamitous to your father's self-regard, a connexion calamitous to my peace of mind! Will you gainsay your mother?"

"Oh, Mother, Mother, forgive your daughter!" sobbed Deborah, falling prostrate before her and thrusting her face deep into the folds of the maternal gown.

"Be silent, Deborah, lest your father hear and come to investigate — leave me, get up and go. This, then, is how you make your mother glad, wayward child?"

"Mother, I beseech you! Do not send me from you — it would be as if you cursed me — and the sole offence I have committed is bringing distress to your heart. May I be permitted to explain?"

"Debby, my own daughter, how pitiless you have become! Have I not endured abundant torture at your hands as it is? Wherein have I proved myself so unworthy of your sympathy? Had your inclination been free from all guilt, still, the instant it caused the crushing burden of your father's displeasure fall upon me, and upon you his malediction, you ought to have relinquished it. Beware — those who will not offer up what must be surrendered often find themselves offered up in turn."

"Yet frequently it proves simpler to suffer immolation than to perform it upon oneself. No credit is given for efforts that come to nothing, for struggles that achieve nothing, for battles fought unseen and unwitnessed. Do you truly suppose it an uncomplicated thing to uproot from the heart a bond forged in the nursery, a love nurtured through all the years of one's life, a devotion fixed upon a faultless creature, upon one supremely elect? Is it your belief that an immeasurable affection can be so readily torn out when it is built upon

sincere regard, and most especially when the object of that affection has committed no offence except that of lowly birth? Whatever others may do — turning their hearts on and off like lamps at someone's bidding — I have no such power. Not one remedy has gone untried; I have reasoned with myself in every conceivable way to conquer this feeling; and each action taken to extinguish it has but made it burn more fiercely. Ultimately I have ended this impossible war with nature; I have given myself over to the stream; should it sweep me into a chasm, submissive to all that must befall, I shall permit it to bear me onwards."

"Pray inform me — where did you learn to speak in such a hateful fashion? Did your plough-boy teach you to talk thus?"

"He whom you call my plough-boy is not one to bring shame; and should my manner of expression be hateful, then my heart must be hateful too, for my words are born of what lies within. What is more, I am grown beyond girlhood; I am at the third part of my days, and misery has been my instructor in all things."

"What miseries do you speak of? Merciful Lord! Were your father to overhear you, you would be as good as destroyed!"

"Do I not stand prepared for whatever may come?"

"So your father the Earl's mistrust has substance after all?"

"Yes, Mother."

"So you have taken up again with that boy Pat?"

"Yes, Mother, I see Mr Patrick Fitz-Whyte again."

"How long has this been going on?"

"Approximately a twelvemonth."

"Audacious thing! Where on earth have you been rendezvousing with him?"

"On certain occasions Mr Patrick has called at the castle while you were not at home; though as a rule our meetings take place after dark in the grounds. Let God bear witness that never have we strayed from what is right, and that our conversations have been nothing but honourable and morally instructive! You must believe me when I tell you — Mr Patrick is an honourable man!"

"Had I suspected you might have failed in virtue, I should stand more blameworthy than you yourself would be, my daughter, supposing you had indeed been overcome. I continue to think well of you, my girl; when one removes one's good opinion from a person, one either encourages their faults, or drives them to embrace evil from sheer spite. Your father has thus far only uncertain intimations, yet even

so he is consumed by a fury beyond all measure; guard against giving him proof — I cannot say what extremes of harshness he may be led to. He lays the blame for your having turned away the various eligible men who have been put forward for your consideration squarely upon your ongoing liaison with Patrick — and very likely he is right to do so. Before long he shall offer you yet another prospective spouse: if you reject him as you have the others, it is his intention to see you locked away in an English reformatory house, there to remain until you have come round to more compliant views."

"Locked away! Am I then to be regarded as a madwoman, as a woman of the streets? As to this spouse they mean to force upon me, though it were the Young Pretender himself, I would send him packing! The vow I have made I intend to observe — to be Patrick's, or else to be the Lord's."

"Deborah, you are a woman lost to all goodness! Love you may revere, but you certainly hold a daughter's duty in small esteem. You have scant regard for me — for me, your loving mother."

"Even if I have grown bitter, Mother, trust that my filial piety runs deep! But it is utterly unthinkable that anyone should fancy filial love can exist without mutual care and attention; that all the demands of such love should be imposed upon the child, who can keep it alive only through complete self-denial, through the denial of her rational

faculties, and often through the sacrifice of her youth and the utter ruination of her life. Do you imagine that any bond of love can hold, can continue to breathe when these are the conditions imposed upon it?"

"Surely you do not mean to apply such thoughts to your miserable mother: we have each carried our share of the load, I should think? In fact, though I do not mean it as a rebuke, I think my cup has overflowed more than your own. How much have I borne, how greatly have I suffered for your sake! Because when you were but a babe I happened, without meaning to, to permit your intimacy with a child, I have been made culpable for all that has come of it throughout your adult life. Deborah, do not add your voice to those who blame your unfortunate mother! Oh, how unfortunate I am. You talk of a child's devotion bought with self-sacrifice and the destruction of one's life: I am she who has bought it at such expense. Oh, all those bright dreams I cherished as a girl! Oh, how wisely heaven keeps the future hidden from our eyes."

"If only you could see into my soul, my dearest Mother, you would understand how profoundly I love you. Suffer me to embrace your feet, suffer me to weep against your brow! There exist dreadful realities in this existence: you whom I cherish with all my heart, you to whom I wished only to give pleasure and felicity, you whose pain I would have given

anything to relieve — yet by some cruel fate, by some obscure mischance or pitiless fatality, I have forever dragged you down into unhappiness and bitter regret. How frightful it is to think upon!"

"My sweet child, how your affection revives my very soul! Might there not be joyful days reserved for us still? One cannot know. You can still let me experience some measure of joy. So much have I borne! Be merciful, do not heap more suffering upon me, or I shall sink beneath it! Swear it to me — it is the only sacrifice I shall ever ask again — swear you will give up seeing Mr Patrick."

"Give up Mr Patrick entirely!" Deborah cried, aghast at the very suggestion.

"I know full well how grievous it is to forsake the one who holds your heart; I recognise that what I ask would be a hard thing indeed, if the sacrifice were wholly of your own choosing; but surely it is better — is it not? — to head off a rupture that must come, and to be the author of it rather than its victim? Yet is it not astute to turn what lies altogether beyond our command into a deed proceeding from our own sovereign choice? Mark me well — your father has had you followed with minute attention for the past several days, ever since he was given cause to suspect. His watchers would catch you in the act before long. Pray God it does not come to that! You would be lost, and I along with you."

"Oh, that you would demand of me a thing that could be done!"

"I insist upon nothing, my girl; I only pray you will avoid walking into a trap, I only pray you will keep yourself from falling into an abyss of suffering; I beseech you to take mercy on me!"

Oppressed with grief and choking on her tears, Deborah threw herself at her mother's feet, and there she stayed, taciturn and lifeless as a piece of statuary. After that lengthy hush, raising her face and her downcast eyes, she spoke with chilling detachment: "What you desire shall be done, Mother, I shall keep myself from that abyss of suffering; will you allow me but one kindness?"

"Name it, my child."

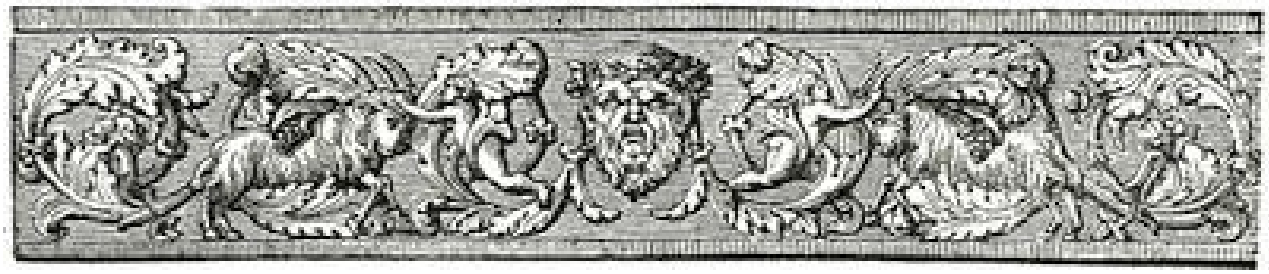
"Give me permission to see Mr Patrick but once again, that I may bid him farewell, to break the news of this judgment to him myself at the very least? We are to meet this very night in the park: I shall go to him there, I shall lay everything before him!"

"Deborah, come let me fold you in my arms! I was sure you were a good girl at heart. Then from this day forward you will put an end to every encounter?"

"I swear it to you."

"I pray you will remain constant in such judicious temper; I pray this resolution proves no fleeting thing, for your mother's happiness depends upon it! You will not make a liar of me, then, after all I have sworn in your defence? I have stood surety with your father for the rectitude of your actions. Ere long his suspicions will fall away, and, embarrassed at having wrongly charged you, he may yet recover his former kindness. Justice demands, in truth, that this unfortunate boy be told, and told with consideration for his feelings; to break off with him in an ungenerous fashion and leave him tormented by uncertainty would indeed be cruel. Keep your appointment this final time; but guard yourself carefully against being surprised by your father's men. That is the breakfast bell now. Make haste back to your own quarters: thence, as usual, you shall make your way to the breakfast room. Do not let yourself seem flustered; your father is to learn nothing of the conversation we have just had."

As she pronounced these closing words, the Countess Cockermouth kept Deborah locked in her embrace, but the young woman, absorbed in her own reflections, remained unresponsive, seeming almost to find these maternal embraces painful, receiving them with that indulgent air of resignation one affects when congratulated for virtues one does not possess.



IV.

Standing at her glass, Deborah occupied herself in smoothing her disordered gown and restoring some semblance of order to her dishevelled finery; she withdrew a pace, she came closer; regarding herself with restless scrutiny, she would arch her shapely form and cast her head back across her shoulder that she might see if her deportment had grown steady once more. Her fingers moved across her face, effacing the tell-tale lines left by her weeping. At the renewed summons to breakfast, thinking herself to have masked with adequate skill the marks of what she had suffered, she took the direction of the morning-room. That she might command a fuller measure of composure, she took the stairs with exceeding slowness, pausing at each tread to breathe upon her handkerchief until it grew warm, then holding it to her eyes in the manner of a soothing application, to blot away the wetness that yet clung to them.

"You have delayed us, Debby," the Countess said, at the moment when, entering, she dropped a curtsey before her father, who, though he feigned to pay no heed to her coming, fixed her with a look that silently bade her to be done with such punctilio.

Thus, with no more ado, Deborah felt the approaching squall in her very bones, and, quivering like some small bird that finds itself caught out in the violence of a storm, she slipped into her place and made herself very small.

The Earl succeeded in wholly disconcerting her by the sternness of his scrutiny, all the while whispering in an undertone to the Countess:

"My lady, does it escape your notice — the exhausted look of Miss your daughter? The heaviness of her eyes, the soreness about them? One smells the night-watch in all this. I make no doubt, though Chris heard her not, that she has been abroad all night under the open sky. So oft to the well goes the jug that in the end it shatters. By a Papist's guts! Things are going to the devil!… Your appetite has deserted you, has it, Miss? You take nothing; you do but dab at your plate."

"Indeed, I have no appetite, sir."

"Small wonder," whispered the Earl aside to his wife, "for one who has made a banquet in the small hours. Is it sickness, Miss?"

"No, sir."

"Then what have you been about? You look for all the world like the risen dead."

"It is not sickness, sir, but I am not myself. A short time since I was overcome by a faint, and it has left me still rather shaken."

"That is easily explained," the Earl repeated softly to the Countess: "so oft to the well goes the jug that… By a Papist's guts! It all goes amiss! Did I not master myself I should dash the minx to the ground… Oh! Miss suffers from swoons, does she!... Madam, have your girl begone; I refuse to break bread with such a jade! Be off with you! You are not to enter any place where I might be found; you are not to appear in this house hereafter. Be gone, I tell you!"

"Father! Oh, Father!..." Deborah sobbed over and over, dissolved in tears.

"Get out!..." Cockermouth persisted.

"But in what has my daughter wronged you, sir?..."

"Be quiet, my lady pander!…"

Shouting out these last abuses, he launched a metal tankard at the girl at the very moment she was quitting the room; it caught her on the shoulder and wrung from her a long moan. So violent was his rising in his wrath that the

table, heaved upward by his prodigious gut, toppled to the floor. He next hurled himself out of the breakfast-parlour, wreaking havoc as he went, and shut himself up in his suite of rooms.

Having fled this disgraceful uproar, Deborah took herself off to her room. Once there, overwhelmed with sorrow, she dropped onto a sopha, and the besieging phantoms of desolation bore her down into a heavy drowse. Still, this was not the first time her eyes or her heart had been subjected to such horrors; from her earliest years she had looked on at her mother's long suffering; but in this instance she was more than a silent witness — she saw herself embarked upon the first act of a tragedy whose catastrophe inspired her with dread.

The valet entering with her dinner plate found her as she had been, in complete dishevelment, and still drowsing on the sopha. Lifting the serviette, she found beneath it a note bearing no signature, unmistakably her mother's writing, which read simply:

"Should you stand in need of aught, let me know through whoever delivers your food. If you go tonight where you are meant to go, you cannot be too careful: you expose yourself to grave danger. Would it not be more prudent to forgo it, and tomorrow have your final message delivered to Mr Patrick? For the love of God, I beg you to do so!"

"A farewell to you!... Patrick, my love, my life!... Bid you go, Patrick!" Deborah cried out as she came to the end of the note. "Oh! My mind revolts against such a thing, my feeble wit cannot make sense of such a duty, my soul takes fright at the very idea!... Bid you farewell, Patrick! Can you imagine such a thing?... Recall my love as though it were an order given: but one recalls only what one has decreed — and what decree did I ever issue? Tell me that! We send away what belongs to us, what we have tired of. But to bid farewell to the raptor clutching us in its grip, to the gaoler who fetters us with chains; to cast off the force that has us in its grasp — it cannot be!… The little one may dash his trinket to pieces, but can the trinket do the same to him?... Ah! and what, pray, am I!... Can the mill-wheel grind itself down? Can the rooted tree pluck itself free? Can the lowland overcome the summit that looms above?... What then of myself! Can I swallow up the abyss that swallows me?... This is among those impossibilities my mind cannot admit! This is the manner of thought from which my bounded reason flees in horror! I! Bid you farewell, Patrick! Can you comprehend such a thing?"

Having nibbled a crust of bread wet with her tears, and drunk a little water to cool the fever in her chest, Deborah gathered a mantle round herself and made her way down a lengthy passage that gave onto an ancient turret, set within later buildings and styled the East Tower by reason of its

position; what had been a defensive work was now a viewing platform, its martial battlements superseded by a handsome balustrade. From the great height of this terrace was disclosed a landscape dark and desolate: southward and to the east lay an illimitable plain, black and rust-coloured; black in the regions of the turbaries, rust-red at the marshlands; hardly a tree, merely furze and ling and some misshapen hovels sunk halfway into the soil. On the northern and western sides stretched long lines of treeless rock, seeming like lofty ramparts cracked and broken by heaven's fire, which edged the horizon; dotted among them, the wreckage of towers, churches, and religious houses held the eye in fascination and sent the mind wandering back through the days long departed.

Here a cleft torn through the stone opens into a bottomless gorge, terrifying to look upon. Through the depths of this chasm — known as the Devil's Gorge — runs a slender stream with but one side accessible, a space so cramped that even a wagon would be hard put to it to pass. At half the height of the precipice it rushes forth with tremendous noise from a cavern's maw, which heightens still further the hellish nature of the scene.

The waters of this stream — frigid in the summer season, tepid in wintertime — are held in great repute by the villagers in those parts, who believe them capable of working

all sorts of wonderful remedies. Yet the quality most beyond dispute is this: that when a person is foolhardy enough to venture into its waters, he is cured of life itself.

Description would afford but a poor idea of the splendid spectacle made by the declining sun glimpsed at the far reach of this gorge, rendered narrower yet by the laws of distance: the striking beauty of that elongated gloomy corridor closed by a portal of blazing gold, in which the sun's flashing disc appeared like the rose-window of some great cathedral.

Here was the sublime spectacle Deborah was wont to come and gaze upon from atop the East Tower, a spectacle of which she and Patrick together had never tired in happier times.

What countless hours the two had whiled away in that retreat, given over to musing and to elevation of spirit! What spot could she have held more precious? Nowhere was there a stone or paving-slab on which Patrick had not cut their initials wreathed about each other, or some significant dates fraught with remembrance and longing.

Aloft upon that turret, no ear could reach them but Heaven's: Heaven is a confidant most discreet, Heaven does not deride, Heaven knows no perfidy.

Then too, from that tower's height, Deborah's gaze would spin a web of golden filaments after the fashion of a

spider's spinning: one strand reached towards Patrick's granary, another towards the Torrent's Hollow Willow, yet another towards the ruined Priory turned churchyard, and a hundred more to a hundred other haunts where they had collected herbs together, where they had shared the reading of some treasured volume.

V.

At the cracked chime of the manor bell announcing the hour of one in the morning, Deborah, who had thrown herself down upon her bed without undressing, got to her feet noiselessly and without light, and feeling her way down the East Tower's lengthy corridor, reached at last a postern opening onto the castle's waterless moat. Close by the park gates, seizing upon whatever shrubs came to hand, she hauled herself up the counterscarp; then, to throw any pursuer off the scent, rather than take the direct and well-travelled road to the Devil's Gorge, she struck into a tortuous path so overgrown as to be almost untraversable.

She believed more than once that some small noise was dogging her trail, yet turning and discovering nothing, she persuaded herself it was likely a wild thing abroad in the darkness, or else nothing but the sound of her own passage thrown back by the trees. For all the clarity of the sky above, the overgrown thickets bordering that savage little track rendered it impossible to distinguish a single object. Once she

had come to the rushing water, she made out far off the voice of Patrick singing — an old tune it was, all about waiting and longing. Hearing him sing, she gave a little shiver of delight, and when at last she drew near the Hollow Willow where they were wont to meet, she called forth the watchword they had long agreed upon:

"TO BE!..."

"OR NOT TO BE!…" the singing voice called back. Whereupon a young man of commanding stature, cloaked about, stepped out from the tangled brake and hastened to her side.

"Fair greeting to you, Deborah — grace itself, and ever true to the hour," he said with tender feeling, and took her hand to kiss.

"My lord is at my side," she said, dropping a slight bow, "and blessed am I above all women. Pat, dear Pat, how I have pined for the sight of you! Oh, if you only knew! I bear such tidings as you cannot conceive! The world has turned so strangely since last we spoke! You poor dear, making such cheerful song, your heart knew peace but a moment ago. Must I be the one to break in upon your joy! Learn to detest me, Patrick, for I am the dark angel of your life."

"Nay, you are my guardian spirit, and the entire matter is known to me. I was pacing about the park entrance this

evening, looking up at the East Tower in hopes of catching sight of you, when I chanced upon your mother the Countess walking by herself along the avenue of yews. She received me most courteously at first, but presently, working her way round to it with elaborate caution, she raised the matter of recent events and besought me to abandon you for good; next she launched into violent reproaches, accusing me of carrying on in secret and outwitting her vigilance; and then, to crown all, she issued her orders: commanded me in the most solemn terms to put an end to our connexion. 'I do not mean to be uncivil, and I have no desire to humble you,' were her words on quitting me, 'yet when one so far forgets what is due to oneself as you have forgotten it, he stands in need of a sharp reminder! Pat — and here she used the intimate form with a look of scorn — what is it you are after? That is my daughter, Deborah! The Countess of Cockermouth, no less! And what are you, Pat? Why, no more than a clumsy oaf!'"

"To think of your being handled thus, Patrick! I implore your forgiveness for making you taste such bitter gall! It is I who have brought such misery upon you — I alone! Merciful heavens! What is this, Patrick? Your face is scarred all over!"

"Her ladyship your mother had just quitted me, and I was pushing further into the park, my head hung low, walking lost in troubled thoughts, when the drumming of hooves came galloping up the selfsame walk — the Earl it was, putting

Berebere, that handsome mare of his, through her paces. The instant his eye fell upon me he put spurs to his beast, made straight for where I stood, all but struck me in passing with a single word of greeting — 'Swine!' — and smashed his whip over my brow."

"Oh, my poor friend! But Patrick, pray do not support yourself there — that shoulder pains me, I am hurt."

"Not you also, Debby?"

"'Tis of no consequence — I took a fall.... But no, Pat, I cannot dissemble — this too was my father's doing, his violence. This very morning, while we breakfasted, he flung a pewter jug at me, which by heaven's grace did no more than strike my shoulder."

"My noble Debby, you cannot but see — your every woe proceeds from me; the hour has come when I must cut off the supply of your afflictions."

"Nay, in very truth you are not the fountain of my afflictions, no more than I of your sufferings. Pain and grief, delight and bliss — all these belong to us in common, as they do to any two beings united into one, to any paired life. Your lot in life has become mine, and mine yours; if one be doomed, it will pull the other down as well — well, then, let it be so! He who wounds you wounds me also; he who cherishes you cherishes me; through love all things are paired

and joined, misfortune as well as blessing. Whatever tempest lays the oak low lays the mistletoe low likewise; the oak says not to the mistletoe, 'You are to blame for my fall'; nor does the mistletoe charge the oak with having caused its ruin; neither says, 'I am in pain, and you also' — rather they say, 'We are in pain.' Let us quit this tangled spot, Patrick; my mother had me pledge that we would be vigilant. Were we by any mischance followed here, an eavesdropper might creep amongst this scrub, come close, and surprise us in our talk. What I must ask of you needs to be held in the strictest confidence. Come up with me to the hillside clearing — there we can sit upon that lonely stone, where none can steal near us or play us false."

"Debby, we are scarcely past our adolescence, and here we are, reduced like the aged to living henceforth upon nothing but recollection. Long has our happiness been in decline; this day it has slipped below the edge of the world; this day the star by which we steered has set forever. All the horrors of the night are preparing to invade our very souls. But the days to come, no less than this present hour, are God's alone. His will be done! What a gulf now separates us from those days when we might disport ourselves together in perfect freedom, since before the aristocracy had scored its line between us and made its decree: This side is gentle, that side low; this is of my order, and that of the common folk;

when my tokens of love were no stain upon you, when to be seen with me was not reckoned a disgrace; gone too is that later season when, whenever your father was abroad, I was allowed — albeit with caution and circumspection — to love you, to be with you, to pursue my studies in your library, and to go botanising with you across the wooded hills. With what sweet satisfaction I call to mind our playful botanical wranglings, our learned quarrels over how to organise our collections, over questions of genus and family and the healing virtues of our simples! How we fussed over our little garden patches, with what anxious devotion we watched over our seedbeds! Today there stands between us a moat! The very moat that nobility has drawn about itself, like unto that which Romulus set about his newborn city, and which none may vault over, as Remus found to his cost, but at the price of death. It's no want of courage that holds me back from the abyss: it is only that I must needs draw a woman down with me as I fall, and that woman, Debby, is you! Heaven keep me always from proving a stone of scandal in your path!"

"Yet here we stand already at the very bottom of the chasm, and the two of us must find our way out together. Do you take my meaning, Patrick?"

"Every bit as clearly as you understood me."

Having spoken thus, he stood up and fell to striding about, wordless, among the heather. And Deborah, who spoke not either, stayed leaning against the crag.

The faint lustre of the moon, falling upon him as he moved through the underwood, gave him the aspect of a creature from some occult design, or of one of those romantic wayfarers that artists are wont to place in their lonely prospects.

This Mac-Phadruig — Patrick Fitz-Whyte, as he was otherwise called — stood tall, and carried himself nobly; fine of feature he was, blue-eyed and fair-skinned, with hair of the palest gold; genteel and seemly were his ways; no trace of the churl appeared in how he moved or spoke; indeed, he might have claimed without challenge the bearing of any castle-bred lord, had he but possessed one quality alone: a little of that brazen impudence which marks the true aristocrat.

The simplicity of his dress was offset by a richness of style that evoked the ancient raiment of the land. Long blonde tresses he wore, plaited in the style called *gibbes* or *coulins*, whilst a patch of beard adorned his upper lip in what was known as the *crommeal* fashion. These modes of Ireland, outlawed under Henry the Eighth and long fallen into desuetude, gave him an alien air amongst his fellows, all of whom had been bred to English manners.

So admirable an impulse, this wish to stand as near as might be to the ancestors one reveres, to constitute in one's own being a living cult of departed times, was quite lost upon his neighbours; worse still, men accounted him a fool for it. None but Deborah applauded such constancy; not for the world would she have suffered her Coulin to appear tricked up in London fashion, like some cockney.

In days gone by, maidens were wont to call their sweethearts by this name of *Coulin*. Charmed by this old term of endearment, Deborah took pleasure in addressing Patrick thus; and when she spoke it, the word itself was a kind of tenderness. He that has ever surprised the dulcet word *Caligneiro* upon a Provençal woman's lips will alone understand the full enchantment of *Coulin* as Debby spoke it. Some words exist of such delicious softness, shaped by the lips of a lover, that not any musical instrument might sigh out a tone more harmonious. These are treacherous perfumes that work an intoxication upon the senses. Such are the deadliest arms that any Delilah wields.

Just as those petty weekly fashions, contrived for the adornment of coxcombs and silk-clad beaux, deserve nothing but our contempt, so do the indigenous and hereditary modes of a nation — their ancestral garb and native dress — command our profoundest consideration. It is thus that despots and conquerors have always regarded such matters,

and rightly have they done so. Let a nation in bondage refuse the language of its masters and cling with sacred devotion to the ancestral dress — that nation is, for all its chains, free still, unvanquished still, indomitable yet. What guards a nation is not the strength of its strongholds, but the character of its native ways. If those who frame our laws had but the cunning of tyrants, they would have condemned as traitors to their country — nay, consigned to the scaffold — all who dare transform their native costume or affect the fashions of alien races. It is not by the marriage of blood or the blending of races that the vanquished are made one with their victors, but by the imposition of a common dress and a common tongue. Those Muscovites who defied Peter the Czar and clung to their beards and ancestral robes were not, in truth, defending the hair on their chins or the cloth on their backs — they were defending their very liberty. Whither has it conducted the Polish nation, this forsaking of their native dress? In outlawing the cloaks worn by the dwellers of Erin's green isle, in outlawing their tongue and their wandering bards, the eighth Henry struck not at cloak or language or song — he dealt a death-blow, final and irrevocable, to Irish freedom itself. As Sultan Mahmoud now labours to make Russians and Frenchmen of his Turks, let no man suppose the question turns upon turban or chapeau, upon caftan or riding-coat, upon fermented honey or the juice of the vine — nothing less is at stake than the outright murder of the Eastern world!

Just as the despot's chief labour is to smooth away all those native irregularities and local distinctions which clog the wheels of his triumphal chariot, so the nation rousing itself from slumber, the nation that would strike off its fetters, makes it its first business to reclaim its ancestral aspect: in this spirit did the Moreotes invoke their ancestral name and become Hellenes again.

The German students' attempt to restore the old Teutonic manner, which Mr Kotzebue so roundly censured, dealt a blow to the very vitals of despotism; whereupon the despots, taking fright at this bold pronouncement, quaked upon their exalted seats and commanded in God's name that all long hair and elegant moustaches be shorn away.

Of all outward signs, costume most powerfully declares the sentiments and the determination of man and nation alike: it is their enduring vindication of worth, their standing claim to rights that cannot be surrendered.

All the finest qualities of the Irish were Patrick's by birthright: a sweetness of disposition, a courtesy of manner, a warmth of welcome, a liberality of spirit, an endurance of hardship, a fearlessness in beginning, a courage and fire in carrying through; his was an artless nature that yet sparkled with wit and could turn satirical upon occasion; he was easier gulled than set right again; affectionate, constant, loyal, and honest; he would never acknowledge himself beaten, never

make terms with wrong; and with the enemy's heel at his windpipe, he would be plotting rebellion still. A sorry dough from which to knead slaves, but a fertile one for creating fellows who will break bread at your side. Pious out of despair, after the manner of all who groan under tyranny; careless of existence, as are all the miserable — whence their inestimable worth as fighting men.

From dwelling at the castle during his early years, from mingling with persons of distinction, from sharing in the genteel education of his devoted Deborah, Patrick had acquired the choicest elements of refined manners: a facility and elegance of speech, a dignified deportment, a becoming reserve, accomplishments all curiously at odds with the homespun character of his attire.

It was not pride that made him love Deborah, nor any sort of silly self-importance. It had come into being well before the age of reflection, having its birth in his infancy. A magnetic force, arising by chance, had united two small, friendless souls — such was the whole of the matter. In love they were receptive and responsive, but wholly innocent of love's philosophy. The loadstone yields to its inherent law guileless, knowing nothing whatever of magnetic science — it is the learned who do the thinking, not the stone. Their sentiment, though it could never be taken from them, remained unmeasured by themselves as to its strength: for it is

solely by lived experience and by making comparisons that we come to fix in our understanding the measure of things, all measure being a matter of relation.

Their affection showed no exterior resemblance to what we call passion; it had about it nothing extreme or tempestuous; it was instead a tranquil, steady, unvarying state of being; an affection so settled and still that they surely regarded it as woven into the fabric of their natures, and as absolutely requisite to their being as the breath they drew or the sustenance they took. Nay, to be frank about it, they thought nothing of the sort; heedless of any why or wherefore, they investigated nothing; it is I, the word-spinner, who think and investigate on their behalf. Love acted upon them, and there's an end of it!

If Patrick had grown somewhat womanish from keeping company with Deborah, the society of Patrick had lent to Deborah a certain gallant ease of manner which, so far from injuring maidenly charms, makes them all the more engaging.

In expression Deborah surpassed Patrick, but in comprehension she fell short; she could not take in a thing entire, nor could she reduce it to a summary. She would kindle immediately and execute forthwith: Patrick began by deliberating, occasionally proceeded to action, and warmed to passion only by degrees. Her emotions were invariably violent, both pleasure and suffering; discouragement found in her a

willing victim: Patrick's emotions were invariably deep-seated; uncertainty might touch and trouble him, but no earthly thing possessed the strength to bring him low. Deborah's faculty of reason issued from her impulsive and demonstrative feelings: Patrick's feelings, tardy and restrained, were born of his reasoning powers: hers was a nature rooted in the tangible, his in the conceptual.

In Patrick's visage every line tended downward to the ground; in Deborah's every line reached upward to the sky. She had a brunette colouring unusual for one of Anglo-Irish blood, her eyes and eyebrows were of the deepest black; and were it not for the elaborate structure, the powdering, and the ribbonry to which her hair was subjected, she would have enjoyed the most magnificent of crowns — a long, jet-black wealth of hair.

Upon the whole, she was more perpetually in motion than Patrick, more resolute by virtue of being less provident, and, in common with him, given to romantic visions of adventure.

A long speechless interval having passed, Patrick ceased his aimless roaming amid the furze and came to where his noble friend sat unchanging, her arm yet upon the rock, for all the world like a weeping figure carved in marble over a cenotaph, or like one of those doleful statues that ornament the tombs of Canova.

And taking her hand in his with a gentle touch, he took his place beside her.

"Oh, Debby, what power have night and darkness to draw one into quiet thought! How loath one feels to mar that splendid silence with the sound of one's own voice! Such is the effect of external scenes upon the soul that, when night lies tranquil about us, we find ourselves speaking in hushed tones without thought, much as beneath the shadowy arches of some great church, the very infidel is overtaken, will he or no, by awe for the majesty of the setting."

"Yes, it is so — the dark turns us inward upon ourselves; our bodies seem to dwindle and close in upon themselves, and the very act of reaching outward acquires something enigmatic."

"Debby, when I spoke to you earlier in metaphors — when I was spinning out handsome periods — I told you that the haughtiness of rank had dug a trench between us that we could not cross without forfeiting our lives, as Remus did; I was not quite right: is there not always some way to circumvent the most stringent of laws? Obliqueness and forbearance accomplish what vehemence and swagger never will. Were we to fill in that trench rather than dare to vault over it, should we not be conducting ourselves with considerably more sense?"

"Yes, certainly."

"I will leave, Deborah!"

"We will leave!... God be praised, who has put into both our hearts the selfsame determination! Yes, Patrick, there is no help for it — we must be gone!"

"That which obliges me to leave obliges me equally to leave by myself. Were it ill done in me to remain near you at present, it would be far worse to carry you off with me, to wrench you from your kindred, to rob you of prosperity, and to give you nothing in return but the chancy lot of some miserable outcast and whatever wretchedness may lie in wait for me. I can steel myself to any trial, excepting only this: that I should see you in pain."

"That, Phadruig, is generosity falsely so called: you could not bear to witness my suffering, so you tell me? But you could bear to know that I was suffering all the same. There is a strong likeness between your generosity and that of the cut-throat who delivers his blow with his face turned aside."

"Might you not have waited until I had finished speaking before condemning me so harshly? Had you heard me through, you would have discovered that what my proposal wants in generosity, it makes up for in common wisdom. To steal away together, to elope — 'tis all very fine in story-books, I grant you; but I beseech you, let us consider this

soberly. Here we stand as plotters, my dear; we must set aside all that is fanciful. Things standing as they do to-day, the time has arrived when a choice must be made. We can no longer hope to meet, however seldom, however secretly, without running fearful risks, and yet to part is unthinkable so long as we both remain in this place; we must leave it — here there are naught but thorns beneath our feet. It had seemed to me, then, that I should do well to go first and by myself to France, where people of our nation are loved and made welcome; where I have friends and kinsmen in the army — the Irish regiments chiefly — and amongst the clergy too. By their help and upon their word I can without difficulty secure a position in a regiment, where, God willing and my sword serving, I mean to win my way forward. France rewards those who embrace her cause, those who offer her, as I am prepared to do, their valour and their life's blood. No sooner shall I have won a place for myself, no sooner shall I deem my footing certain, than I shall contrive to let you know; then you may come to me without the smallest risk."

"No, no, Patrick; be your plan never so prudent, I cannot — I will not — agree to it. Together we must go; I cannot bear that we should part. For Heaven's sake, do not leave me in this place — I should die of it! And in any case, I cannot remain — 'tis out of the question! I must wrench myself free from this inferno! My father is soon to thrust upon me yet

one more would-be husband, some man after his own fancy. If I cast this man off as I have cast off those before him, he means to see me imprisoned in some English reformatory. So you see, this robs us of all choice in the matter; I must be gone, and that right speedily."

"Why then, Deborah, if such is the state of things, I've naught left to say but this: let us be gone!"

"I on my side had made no few plans, and when I prevailed upon my mother to let me come here once more — to this, our final meeting — 'twas that I might here concert with you the manner of our escape. I told myself this: should my dearest Pat agree to fly with me into exile, once I have collected my jewellery and whatever I hold most dear, once he is prepared and nothing stands in our way any longer, some moonlit night I would steal from Cockermouth Castle, and together we should make for France by sea. I had fixed upon France, just as you have. There we should live for a time on whatever small means we shall have contrived to bring. After we have used up what little we possess, we shall teach English; we shall turn our hands to anything, until such time as I reach my majority and can compel my guardian to account for the property my grandfather left me."

"My Debby — oh, my Debby — such happiness! Can you imagine it?... How gloriously our love will take wing beneath such fair skies! There, if nowhere else, we shall finally

be free to be ourselves; there our love will not be reckoned a furtive crime; we may love each other in full view of all; we may walk abroad with heads erect; we may both of us appear at the windows without shame. You will be able to say: That man coming towards us is my spouse. I may say: This fair woman who suckles an infant is my own wife, and that infant the fruit we have made together. There your love shall be given to a man, not to some base-born drudge. There, should anyone lash me with his crop, I'll have his throat for it! These hopes by themselves make my soul rear up like a storm-bent poplar springing back from the ground. Oh, but I cannot believe so great a joy is destined to be mine! 'Tis nothing but a dream; we shall wake presently; it is all poetry that the merest puff of wind will brush away as it does the sere leaves of autumn..."

"Say no more, Patrick! Wherefore these mistrustful thoughts that insult our future? Why treat it as delusion just when our joy is coming to pass? What sin have we done before God that He would refuse us this joy? There — the clock chimes; 'tis two of the clock already. We have little time left, Patrick; let us lose no moment in planning our flight: this meeting, as you know, must be our last. When is it to be?"

"I am ready, and yours to command: say the word; a week hence, or earlier still if need be."

"By night we shall flee — 'twill be safer so."

"Midnight, then — are you willing?"

"Patrick, I have just had a capital idea! Now that we are about to fall under the closest espionage, we must exercise every caution lest our plan miscarry at the crucial instant; my father's birthday falls on the fifteenth of this month; on that day the castle is entirely en fête — as you well know, there will be a great press of strangers, the servants will be run off their legs, and keeping any watch over us will be quite beyond doing. I may ready everything in perfect freedom. That evening, as is the custom, there will be a great supper laid for all the noble families round about.... Let that be the hour of our escape; it cannot fail: in all that press of people I shall slip from sight, and by the time they notice I am gone, we will already be far upon our way."

"Brave, Debby, very brave! 'Tis wonderfully thought of."

"So it is settled, Phadruig: the fifteenth, nine o'clock sharp; be you at the park gate, for there I shall be."

"Aye, at the park gates, below the terrace, where the willow-walk begins."

"You have it clear?"

"Past all changing."

"Patrick, I stand before you as yours. I give you all that I am!... Come, let us kneel and bow ourselves: O God, who abidest within our hearts, bless this union of ours, bless this

our love; bless Deborah, who in Thy presence declares herself the servant of Patrick, of Patrick Thy devoted servant, her wedded lord chosen from amongst all the sons of Adam! Protect him, O God! Lead him and fill him full of Thy spirit; the wife will go where the husband goes, but the husband — whom shall he have to follow!"

"Nature, earth, the heavens above — bear ye witness: now and forever, till time shall end, Deborah shall be my spouse and helpmate; I shall be husband unto her: so we pledge ourselves! O God, be Thou my shield! God, guard me well! So shall I shield and guard this woman who yields herself to me with none to shield her."

"Patrick, your finger — let me put this ring on it: my grandfather used to wear it, and as he lay dying he willed it to me as his final, his most precious keepsake — it is a sacred thing to me; I value it as I value my very life, and that is precisely why I offer it to you now: wear it ever."

"I thank you from my heart, my friend. Oh, what glory is mine now! Living or dead, let this token abide on my finger, where you have set it fast! Ah! I am proud of this bond as ever a knight-errant was of his."

"Look — the sky whitens in the east; the dawn must not take us unawares; Patrick, we must go our ways: farewell, my

dear one, farewell! Till the hour comes when we throw off our bonds."

"Farewell, Debby, farewell my great friend! Farewell, love of my heart; have a care for yourself. If we must write to each other, our letters shall be left always where we have left them before. Silent wilds, we intrude upon you now for the last time; our sighs shall wake you nevermore. Thanks be to you, that have afforded us so oft the privacy of your quiet shadows! We forsake you now for all time, bound for a remote shore that will prove as kind to us as you have been, and where our love shall discover — even amidst towns and crowds — that same desert emptiness and liberty we sought here among your crags! Debby — one kiss."

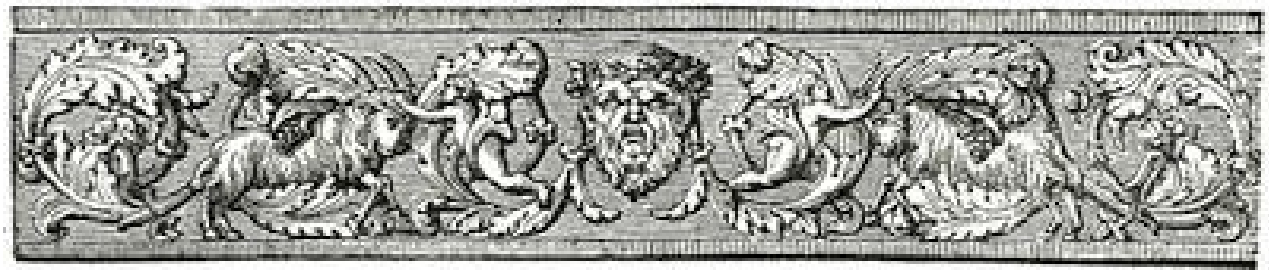
"A thousand of them!... Patrick! My Patrick, my bonny Coulin!"

Weeping, Deborah had wound her arms around Patrick's neck; he held her fast to his labouring breast, his lips — tentative yet aflame — roving across her backward-leaning brow. They had not the power to loose their hold; the spell that bound them was too strong to be broken.

It was the first time they had held each other thus, and the moment lingered: locked in each other's arms, lips meeting lips, they moved down the glade in so mad an ecstasy that they went right past the water's edge and walked straight

into the rushing stream till the water came halfway up their legs. This sudden peril dissolved the bewitchment that gripped them.

Patrick pressed onward into the park's darkness, and Deborah retraced her steps along the untended track she had taken coming. Time and again she seemed to catch the sound of feet following close behind; each time she stood still to listen, the noise stopped — much as the chirrup of crickets in a field goes silent the instant one comes near. More than once this stirring sound ran ahead of her, and the bush-tops swayed and shook as if stirred by preternatural means. A thorny spray she brushed against plucked her scarf clean off her shoulders: she doubled back to fetch it; the spray was still rocking, but the scarf was no longer there. Fright took hold of her, and she quickened her pace. Upon gaining the last of the underbrush bordering the path, the blast of a gun went off just above her; the shock caused her to scream and nearly fall, but, instantly collecting herself, she dropped into the moat that girdled the castle and made for the East Tower. There, great God, how stunned she was! The postern-gate she had pulled shut on leaving was hanging open.



VI.

The morning was but eight hours old when Chris came into Lord Cockermouth's chamber, carrying the nobleman's accustomed tooth-wash, by which was meant a flask of rum that his lordship invariably dispatched before sitting down to his morning meal. Such was the sole article of toiletry that his master deigned to use.

"So, Chris — was the night-watch kept?"

"My commodore, I have not left off cruising since you were good enough to issue me letters of marque[1]; and faith, the hunting has been prime, and the captures no less so."

"By a Papist's guts! D'you tell me...?"

"The matter admits of no further doubt, my commodore. About one in the morning hours, I caught the sound of footfalls in the East Tower passage, then the noise of the postern being unbarred and barred again; whereupon I set off at once in pursuit of whomsoever it might prove to

be, keeping to the same path but hanging well back. Upon going down by the path and arriving at the park railings, I beheld, as distinctly and at such proximity as I now see your own person, Miss Deborah keeping close to the torrent's edge. Upon her coming close to the Hollow Willow, a youth emerged of a sudden and went to meet her, his hair and his voice betrayed him to me directly: it was that cattle-hand Pat! By heaven! A thousand tempests! If I had not held my hand, commodore — your pardon for saying so — I'd have willingly sent a few rounds into the back of that preening milksop! Pushing through the scrub, I drew near them as far as I dared and gave ear. After a sequence of talk that was far from intelligible to me, I distinctly heard Miss Deborah say to Patrick: 'We should not linger in this spot; my mother has warned me to keep ourselves cautious; should we chance to be watched, a person hidden in this copse might listen and make out what we say. Come, let us make for the clearing above.'"

"By a Papist's guts! Did your ears serve you truly?"

"Aye, my commodore — to the very letter. They climbed the hillside, then, and went to sit themselves down on the rock amongst the gorse; there, obliged as I was to maintain a goodly distance lest I betray my presence, their words reached me but dimly. Yet this much I can affirm to you, my

commodore — that rogue of a Pat — Oh! If I had not kept myself in check!"

"By a Papist's guts! It's coming to no good…"

"Here is *my lord* Pat's neckerchief, my commodore, left in the heather; and Miss Deborah's wrap into the bargain. I kept close upon Miss Deborah as she made her way back, and, with your leave, commodore, I afforded her a capital scare: lurking in the shrubbery just as she was passing, I fired off my piece into the sky. The fright of it! That should disgust her with midnight rambles, my commodore, or I'm much mistaken."

"Sea-dog! Blockhead! Pat was the one to follow, not Deborah — to blow his brains out with your piece!"

"Commodore, I do naught without your leave; had I not stood in fear of vexing you, I would cheerfully — aye, most cheerfully — choked the life out of Master Pat, seeing as I've owed him a bad turn these many months. Wholly yours to command, commodore!"

The Earl raged and thundered, kicking his bed-frame to splinters, beating the wall with his doubled fists.

"God-damn! You let Patrick live!" he bellowed. "Craven wretch! Out of my sight, out!"

Of a sudden he threw himself down from the bed, shattering his night-stand against the flooring. All self-

possession had deserted him; the blood had rushed headward; his gaze was all stabbing fury; he stalked the length of the room, his bedding tangling at his heels; he kicked and stamped as if he wished to pulverise something beneath his boots. Chris was rooted to the spot in terror.

"You let him live, Chris!" he yelled, his fury rising to a pitch; he foamed like a mad dog. "Out! Out, I command you! I'll pound you into dust! Are you blind to my fury? Out, I say — I would slay you on the spot!"

Chris fled the room.

Lord Cockermouth stood stock-still a moment, then on a sudden he grabbed the bell-rope and wrenched at it savagely, dropping himself into a chair as he did so.

Scarcely had a moment passed when the Countess flew into the room. Observing both the derangement of her husband and the havoc wrought upon the chamber, she remained thunderstruck in the doorway.

"My lord, was that your bell? Gracious heavens! What has come over you? What can all this disorder mean?"

Cockermouth, hearing his lady speak, lifted his head from where it had drooped against his chest; he made a useless effort to hoist himself from his seat — the extremity of his rage had worn him out; his voice, splintered by choler, came forth muted and rough.

"Ah, there you are, my lady! Splendid! Forever that guileless little expression you carry off to perfection. Upon my word, you would put on the ingénue even with the noose about your neck. Capital! Now put on that honeyed manner of yours, you saintly bowl of pap!"

"Your lordship..."

"Your ladyship..."

"What ails you, my friend? Tell me, pray."

"Oh, I have cause to commend you highly, mistress. You are open, genuine, tractable, biddable; your manner of seeing and conducting yourself is altogether noble; it would be quite impossible for you to demean your position or shirk your responsibilities, quite impossible for you to stain the honour of my household; you are an admirable mother, giving good counsel and keeping good watch. Pray receive my most earnest felicitations."

All this flattery was pronounced with theatrical solemnity and punctuated by brutal, sneering laughter.

"Sir, your wit runs to bitterness."

"Where the barb strikes home, there the hand will fly."

"Make yourself plain, sir."

"You take my meaning well enough."

"You might as well be speaking the Apocalypse, my lord, for all the sense I can make of it."

"Ah! You sought to gull me, did you, my guileless dame! You have ever made it your practice to defy my orders; you have ever laughed at my desires; you have never deigned to preserve so much as a particle of dignity or honour the most ordinary decencies. Mark me well! You are provoking me past all bearing!"

"I do not know, my lord, in what manner I have sinned."

"Ah! You would make a dupe of me! You have set yourself to ruin my daughter's reputation! I will not permit it! What have they paid you for her?"

"My lord, I am this child's mother! The way you speak is detestable."

"How much did you accept from Mr Pat? You plotted together with him, you made his designs easier to accomplish, all the while assuring me of his blamelessness and thrusting aside my thoroughly just apprehensions. That passes for artfulness with you, I imagine. Madam, cunning of that sort will land you in Newgate[2]."

"Sir, you do me outrage! You charge me wrongfully!"

"You are lying, woman!"

"Whence come these hideous fancies of yours?"

"Hideous! You have said it yourself... Last night Chris dogged your daughter's steps into the park and found her cooing and billing with Pat like lovebirds; his ears took in her saying to the fellow: 'Let us not remain in this place, my mother has especially charged me that we must keep ourselves cautious...' That, madam, is whence spring these hideous fancies! What do you make of it?"

"I beg of you only that you will attend to what I say, my lord; and you will learn that, though appearances stand against me, my conduct has been above reproach. Though the accounts given by your man Chris seemed incredible to me, I nonetheless dreaded lest your misgivings should turn out to be justified, and therefore, succumbing to a mother's softness of heart, I made Deborah aware of your suspicions touching her conduct, hoping thereby to shield her from the distress your just wrath would visit upon her. I pressed her for the truth; she made a clean breast of her misdeed: this twelvemonth she had been keeping company with Patrick again, above all in the park, in appointments made for the night hours — though in all propriety and all honour."

"So you think! Fiddlesticks!"

"Do not cast aspersions on my daughter, my lord. Play the wit if you must, but are you not mortified by the baseness of your thoughts? You have never had it in you to understand the pure intercourse of two hearts; to you love has ever been

nothing more than some creature of the woods, bestial and lewd."

"Some woodland creature or satyr, no doubt; though doubtless with the utmost respect and honour, my lady."

"Following the reproofs and instruction my duty as a mother compelled me to deliver, I entreated her to put an end to her association with Patrick. She pledged herself to do so, subject to but one proviso: that she be allowed to keep one last assignation she had made with him for yesterday night, in order to declare to Patrick his banishment and offer him an eternal valediction. She was yielding so much to my wishes that I was unable to refuse her so slight a request. I accordingly charged her to keep herself watchful so as to elude your informants, and not to throw away, by want of care in this last interview, all that her good purposes had achieved. Such is the sum of my transgression, I take Heaven as my witness! Let your heart be the arbiter. As regards Deborah, I stand surety for her hereafter, staking my life upon it."

"On your life, you say!"

"She has broken off her connexion with Patrick for all time; as to whether some affection yet persists in her breast... I am unable to judge: none but God can penetrate the secrets of the soul!"

"She has made a final break of it!"

"It is so, my lord."

"Is that your belief?"

"Beyond all doubt!"

"I rejoice to learn it, Countess."

"One gains more by tender appeals than by violence and cruelty."

"Indeed?"

"Why these scoffing airs, my lord? I speak in all seriousness, and still you laugh."

"I smile because of the contentment I derive from the thought that Deborah is now changed altogether as I could wish, altogether for the glory of my house."

"An ill son you have been, my lord; an ill husband you are; an ill father you will prove."

[1] A letter of marque and reprisal was a government license issued during wartime that authorised private citizens (privateers) to attack, seize, or destroy vessels belonging to a foreign enemy. Popular from the 13th to 19th centuries, it legally distinguished privateers from pirates by enabling authorised "prizes" to be sold for profit.

[2] Located at the site of one of the old Roman walls, this prison was notorious for cruel conditions and held high-profile criminals. It was rebuilt four times and demolished in 1904.

VII.

In all his exterior aspect, Lord Cockermouth was a veritable hog of Epicurus[1]. Tall, yes, but of a bodily compass utterly unknown on the far side of the Channel: a brace of men would have found themselves unequal to the task of encompassing his frame. His belly descended in the manner of a monstrous bladder, slapping at his thighs as he moved; these fifteen years past he had been quite a stranger to the sight of his knees. His head — English through and through in its formation — might have belonged to some fantastical puppet-child of outlandish proportions. His nose, brief and tip-tilted, stood at a ghastly remove from his upper lip, and what chin he possessed disappeared entirely into a fleshy ring of fat. He had a face of purple, a hide singed and seared, and small eyes that scarcely opened; one might say he perspired roast beef, claret, and ale at every point of his person. Here, in fine, was a cumbersome bipedal bulb that contrived to shift itself with fair facility and energy, one

of those fleshy polypes, those gigantic fungous, sponge-bodied zoophytes which breed nowhere save in the British Isles.

His revenues having been bled dry by a youth of intemperance, Lord Cockermouth, now past his prime and notwithstanding his impeccable English lineage, had taken to wife the daughter of a rich Anglo-Hibernian.

The father-in-law, Sir Meadowbanks, had not been long in repenting his surrender of the girl — a surrender prompted by nothing worthier than pride in an advantageous match — and, seeking to repair the injury, had lavished upon Deborah a most tender regard. In the intervals when his son-in-law was from home, he had repeatedly made Cockermouth Castle his dwelling, and had as often borne his grandchildren away to his own seat in Limerick. Long had he served as consul to the English trading community at Leghorn, and being a perfect master of Italian, he had delighted in imparting it to Deborah, who subsequently taught the tongue to her friend Patrick. By testamentary disposition in his own script, Sir Meadowbanks had at the last settled upon her all his properties and left her, besides, his Italian books and his gathered paintings, among which were canvases by the old masters that would fetch their weight in gold coin. Lastly, and with no regard whatever for Lord Cockermouth, he had placed the curatorship of this legacy in the hands of an Irish

barrister, one Mr Chatsworth, a young gentleman of probity and unbending resolution, at the mere mention of whose name the aged commodore shook in his shoes.

In the years following his nuptials, Lord Cockermouth had received governorships of sundry Indian outposts, and on several occasions had taken command of modest naval squadrons in one capacity or another. Such times away had afforded Lady Cockermouth the single measure of tranquillity and consolation she was ever to enjoy. In each of his administrative posts, he had succeeded in making himself — and his name, and the thought of him — universally abhorred. It was not injustice that made him hateful, but the fact that he embodied, to a superlative degree, the national temperament, which is to say, he was utterly devoid of human feeling. He was not one to condemn the blameless, but in the most literal application of legal strictures he discovered a silent, savage gratification. He would never have urged anyone into wrongdoing; but let a man falter, and there could be no reprieve — straight to death he was driven. Whatever the circumstance, he imposed the uttermost punishment and most rigorous chastisements. His reputation afloat was quite as fearsome as that he enjoyed ashore. Even the most hardened marauders felt their blood run cold at the sight of that red ensign streaming from his mainmast. Heaven help the freebooters who let him make them captive! Scarcely were

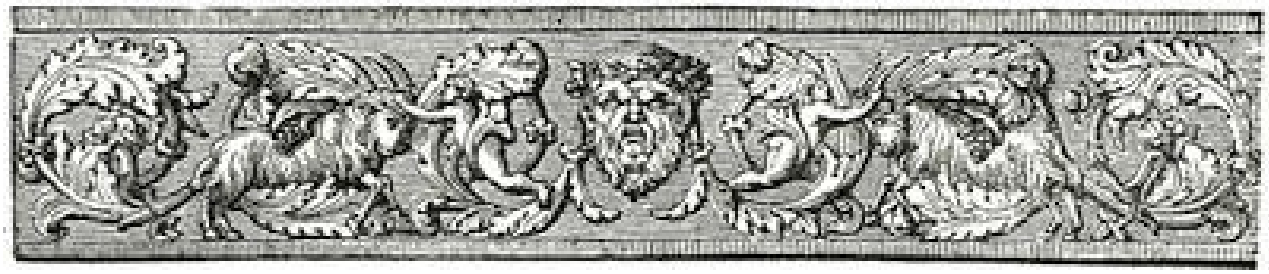
they made prisoner ere they swung from the gibbet. It was, in sober fact, uncommon to observe his brig — whether in hot pursuit or leisurely patrol — without some dozens of bleached and dangling bones hanging from the yards and tackle. His devoted servant Chris — an old sea-rover turned penitent and brought back into the fold of decency — was, from pure natural bent, one of the most fervent of those who strung up pirates in his master's service. Many times, besides, when in want of diversion, his lordship had caused letters of marque to be granted him and, upon his own charge and peril, had fitted out privateers. He maintained as a point of philosophy that the race of man, as the most fecund of all species, must needs be of the smallest worth, and that since the fertility of the species increased proportionally with the spilling of its blood, a thoughtful man ought to scruple not at striking down his fellow, but at hewing down an oak. In other respects, as with all creatures harsh to their fellows, he proved remarkably tender of his own comfort, and his selfishness was of such magnitude that it occasioned remark even among his compatriots — no mean judges of egotism. Eternally stuffed with the finest meats and almost invariably in his cups, he was wont, when given to ease and what passed in his mind for clever jesting, to slap his great stomach with a laugh that might have been the creaking of a gaol-door in some stage-play, crying out: "Devil take this belly! The cursed thing has already run me above a hundred thousand pounds sterling."

To this catalogue must be joined the most preposterous claims to nobility, a brazen arrogance, an intolerable superciliousness, and such stolid, imperturbable gravity as might have passed for profundity among those who mistake silence for wisdom — the sort who would, on such a principle, have no doubt rated Saint Anthony's ass[2] the worthier of the two.

There you have, complete and entire, the ruffian to whom the hapless Miss Anna Meadowbanks, a child of barely sixteen summers, had been thrown as to a wild beast. I cannot bring myself to linger over the catalogue of sufferings that befell her. Entirely unversed in life, unknowing of her own rights, of a sweet and kindly and shrinking disposition, her soul saturated with terror, this mere child had submitted herself beyond hope of recovery to the sceptre — nay, the bludgeon — of her husband. And that warm heart of hers, having discovered no channel through which to expend its fervour, had lavished all the concentrated affection of which it was capable upon Deborah, who remained the single thread that yet tethered her to this world.

[1] "Hog of Epicurus" (*Epicuri de grege porcum*) is a Latin phrase used by the poet Horace to describe himself as a happy, well-fed follower of the philosopher Epicurus. It refers to the Epicurean pursuit of pleasure and freedom from pain, jokingly adopting a pejorative term used by critics to mock Epicureans as self-indulgent.

[2] The "Miracle of the Ass" is a famous event attributed to St. Anthony of Padua (not St. Anthony the Great) to prove the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. A starving ass refused food and instead knelt before the Eucharist held by Anthony, showing adoration, which converted heretics.



VIII.

It was now a week since they had met in the park; and each day without fail Deborah had turned her solitary walk in the direction of the Hollow Willow by the Torrent; there she would dig up the small casket of steel wherein they were wont to place their secret letters, but day after day she found it held nothing for her. Such silence on Patrick's part must have plunged her into grave anxiety, but that she had more than once descried him from the summit of the East Tower, driving his plough across the arable fields that lay beneath.

When she came to the willow on the 10th, a thrill of joy passed through her: she could see that the earth covering the little box had been lately moved; Patrick had not long since placed this billet there.

"I find much to praise in your silence, and I read in it an excellent portent: babbling tongues belong not to honourable

souls. If your letters should one day be made public, their authenticity would be beyond dispute."

The next day saw Deborah commit these words to the steel box.

"You may admire your silence — I admire your little shaft of wit; yet I think that in these self-communings your spirit is far too stern a judge of itself. So little do I tremble at the approach of the decisive hour that I stand firmly persuaded our life and felicity will properly begin only with our escape; even as the Mahometan faith took its beginning from the Prophet's flight. You see, I repay your Attic salt with Oriental spice; honours even. Yet in sober earnest, I feel something very like self-reproach when I reflect upon everything I shall cause my poor mother to suffer. Again and again, when she embraces me with such fondness, I look away to conceal those tears which the idea of my betrayal forces from my eyes. Would that she were harsh as my father is! It is easier by far to play false with the malevolent. I shall own it, even if you think me mad or feeble for doing so: I am so prompted to unburden myself by her outpourings of affection, so moved by her meek acceptance of her lot, that more than once I have longed to kneel at her feet and say: *Mother, I am doing you a grievous wrong!* Methinks it would free me from a monstrous load that threatens to suffocate me; but be easy, Patrick, I will not do it. Trust that I have within me

strength adequate to withstand the urgings of an emotion that would be our undoing, and that a momentary weakness cannot undo the considered resolve of my rational mind. They keep me still locked in my room, and my father I see not; mamma, however, trusts she will presently bring him round. He is bound, she insists, to accord me a full amnesty when his saint's day comes; particularly as he can scarcely avoid doing so when my newest pretender is to be presented."

On the 12th, Deborah found this note.

"Your letter has reached me safely. For mercy's sake, my noble friend, should there be any arrangements you must make before you leave, let them be accomplished in profound secrecy: fear the industry of your father's intelligencers, who will be all the more active now that you and he are still in open hostilities. You know full well the game that is afoot and what is at stake for us both. I live now in perpetual agitation of heart; my spirit is like unto a swallow balancing on a yielding twig, wings aflutter, making trial of its strength, ere it launches forth towards some coast where winter comes not. Eastward I turn my face and stand ready, even as the Israelite at his Passover repast; girded for the journey, with my staff in hand."

The next day, Deborah responded thus:

"My own dear Coulin, I am struck with amazement whenever I contemplate the power of an unconquerable determination; and equally when I think how little mankind employs that will which could ever be made unconquerable. No doubt it serves the welfare of society well, since if each of its sons and daughters had a distinct, personal, ungoverned will, the morrow would see society expire. Those trumpets which threw down the walls about Jericho are symbols most apt of the determined will; but sound that note, and the mightiest walls imaginable shall be overthrown. Come the day after tomorrow, the irons intended to bind our lives in bondage, the dungeon walls wherein our days were to moulder away, shall fall at our will's command and shall themselves fill in the abyss that keeps us apart."

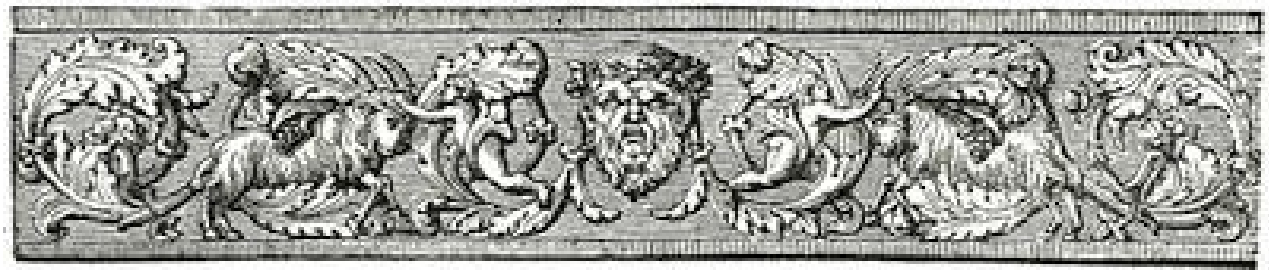
The fourteenth found Deborah confined indoors until the day was almost spent: in that uncertain light between day and night, she stole along circuitous routes to the Hollow Willow, and there, her heart beating high with anticipated pleasure, she knelt to dig up the little steel box; but her knife plunged clean into the soil without striking anything: no casket was there!

The shock of this discovery struck her with redoubled force, for the pleasure she had expected had run so high. Her arms hung suddenly heavy, her head drooped of its own accord, her fixed and sightless eyes dwelt upon the ground;

the workings of her thought, as when the chain of a timepiece is broken, simply stopped.

Once the initial bewilderment had worn off, a plain explanation presented itself to her thoughts: Patrick, she said to herself, will have been reluctant to let the casket remain buried, fond as he was of it; he cannot have brought himself to leave behind that trusty and silent keeper of our correspondence, that precious thing which must ever breathe forth for us the sweet fragrance of remembrance! Patrick will have taken it away with him — how sensible of Patrick!

Approving of this wise measure taken by her friend, she set off again for the castle.



IX.

"Who's that?" Lord Cockermouth called out sharply, catching the sound of movement in his apartments, where he and the lady had been busy since dinner making preparations for the next day's feast. "Who is it, I say?"

"'Tis I, my commodore."

Stepping round behind, Chris stooped to the Earl's ear and said in a low voice: "New intelligence — something you'll want to hear."

"Will you oblige me, madam, by withdrawing? I need a word in private with Chris."

Her ladyship had not failed to notice the fellow's impertinent, secretive murmuring; she stood up with a movement expressive of offended dignity and left them.

"My commodore, not an hour since, when I had your mare Bérébère out for her airing, I caught sight of Master Pat

prowling along the stream-bank. I got off the horse straightway and wormed my way through the scrub to observe him unseen. He stopped under the Hollow Willow-tree, grubbed up the earth, fetched out a box of some kind, put it back into the ground, and took himself off. I made my way, then, with all caution to the tree's roots, worked at the same place in the earth, and dug out this steel box which I now show you. The fastening's some manner of trick-work, and I couldn't force it open for the life of me."

It cost them no little trouble, but by dint of hacking at it they got the lid smashed in. Nothing met their eyes save one note, newly closed with wax, and Cockermouth grabbed it with fierce impatience. His features altered more than once as he scanned the contents; curiosity was displaced by wonder, wonder by a fury barely held in check.

When Chris entered that night to attend upon the Earl's boots, he discovered him planted in the centre of the room, stock-still like some cased figure of Hermes, his head drooping forward, his eyes sunk deep beneath the overhang of frowning brows; he drew upon his pipe.

"Chris, there's bad blood between you and Pat, then? Some old spite against the man?"

"Aye, commodore — a long-standing poison of loathing I've got stored up, and it shan't budge!"

"How came you by this loathing?"

"A grievous affront, sir — one that cuts deep still. It's two years since, or thereabouts. On a Sunday I asked Pat if he'd take a pot with me at the ale-house. Right there in the marketplace the fellow turned me down, saying it was his custom to take nothing but water, and that only with his food. 'Too proud to wet your whistle with an ancient salt?' said I. 'Quite the swell, aren't we, my cattle-boy!' 'Well, Mr Chris,' says he in reply, 'seeing you make yourself offensive, let me tell you — I've never drunk nor will I ever drink with an English dog, unless it's out of his cracked skull.' At which, my commodore, enraged by such abuse — quite forgetting I was past the age when I snapped Frenchies over my thigh like kindling — I lunged at him and gave him a mighty clout. But he, being young and robust, knocked me senseless with a couple of blows, to the loud cheering of the whole village, who cried out: 'Down with the English dog!' Ah, sir, it lies heavy on me still! Weighs like a round of shot, it does, commodore. To stomach an affront like that — I, Chris! A veteran filibuster! Chris, the tiger in the boarding-rush! Chris the cannibal! That's what I was known as. May I be damned if I let this grudge die! I shan't depart this life without kneeling on his breast and sticking my steel in his vile gullet!"

"Shall we unite our hatreds, Chris?"

"Too great an honour, commodore."

"Do you want to share in the settling of accounts?"

"More honour than's due me, sir."

"Get us two bottles of rum, and bring your pipe along."

Presently Chris returned equipped with the necessaries, whereupon the Earl closed and barred the doors fast.

Those in the castle noticed that his lordship's room remained lit throughout the night.

X.

What with his systematic plundering, his open and declared hatred of Irishmen, and the savage treatment he had meted out to poor souls unfortunate enough to have been captured by him when the south of Ireland rose in revolt, the Earl had scarcely endeared himself to the mountainfolk of Kerry — a people whose hostile temper the clergy took excellent care to keep alive; for throughout the length and breadth of Ireland the clergy held Cockermouth in abhorrence, and with ample justification: in 1723, standing before that Parliament which styled itself Irish, he had proposed — seriously, mind you, and with stubborn tenacity in a discourse of no small duration — the restoration of castration as a punishment to be inflicted upon priests of the Catholic faith. Greeted with transports of approval and passed by the Parliament, then sent across to England bearing the warmest recommendations to the King, the proposal had failed of enactment, thanks only to Cardinal Fleury, who prevailed upon Minister Walpole to see it quashed.

Thus the fifteenth, which marked the birthday of the Head-landlord of Cockermouth Castle, went by, as it habitually did, in tranquil industry. Not a villager joined in the celebrations at the castle; the bells hung silent, troubling no echo with ceremonious pealing. None came save the farmers, tenants and workmen, who presented themselves betimes to discharge their requisite courtesy; none save a hundred or so of the district's beggars, who came piping in to offer their feudal obeisance — to the larder.

A table was arranged by the Countess's command in a chamber on the lower storey of the castle, and to these folk a hearty breakfast was given, over which she and Deborah presided with gracious hospitality. The sight was an admirable one: that gentlewoman and her lovely daughter, though dressed with elegance, were entirely without affectation of manner as they moved through the smoky chamber among a rabble of miserable beings, seeing to it with tender vigilance that all were equally served; keeping back the sweet things for the little ones and the choicer morsels for the old folk; speaking kindly to all comers; offering words of solace to the most broken in spirit, and raiment to those who had scarce a thread to cover them.

From beginning to end of the repast — and a riotous affair it was, such as only beggars can make — bumpers were continually pledged to Lady Cockermouth and Miss Deborah.

At the dessert course the pipes began skirling afresh with redoubled energy; whereupon a grey-headed beggar who passed for a minstrel sang them folk-songs and lays in honour of their noble benefactresses.

With the coming of nightfall, lights blazed forth along the avenue and in the castle's principal court; and then came thronging in the guests — some afoot, some mounted, some in their coaches.

The party was made up of the propertied families from near at hand and gentlemen drawn from the country round and from the towns lying within a convenient distance. A company of footmen stood ready on the portico, each bearing his lanthorn, and conducted the arrivals into the grand summer salon, where they were received by the Right Honourable Earl of Cockermouth — resplendent in the full dress of a commodore — and by the Countess, a woman still in possession of her looks, her beauty rendered all the more affecting despite being half-buried beneath an extravagance of finery. As fair as her mother, but quite unadorned, Deborah sought to vanish into the press of guests — the better to elude those genteel posturings which her troubled heart could ill have endured — and there she kept herself modestly obscured, much as a violet hides beneath a little clump of greenery.

Her retirement proved short-lived, for no sooner had the affianced husband arrived than she was hauled forth from her hiding-place and brought forward to meet all her prospective relations, who had come expressly to seal the compact. Deborah acknowledged them all with gracious civility, though she spoke not a syllable, and answered their felicitations — together with the gallantries of her intended — merely with courtesies.

The bridegroom was a squire of the shire — a jeune premier of forty summers — sprung from a family which had enjoyed some distinction in the days of Charlemagne, and which had marched with William the Conqueror in times of old. This distinguished offspring had by no means fallen away from the family pattern; the fire of ancestral ambition blazed in him undiminished; his campaigns, however, were directed not at nations but at the daughters of men. The entirety of his days was given over to affairs of the heart. Some years back he had come home from London to take up residence among his relations, his constitution having been grievously damaged by his exertions; and following his homecoming, the numbers inhabiting the countryside about the family seat had well-nigh doubled. Country wenches ran from him as they might from the pestilence, or as Daphne once ran from Apollo; but these poor pastoral creatures, unlike their classical predecessor, underwent no convenient change into shrubbery.

To curb his dissipations, the expedient had been hit upon of marrying him to Deborah — she being considered, in point of fact, as little better than a species of curative ointment; and our licentious squireling had willingly lent himself to this scheme, which put within his grasp both a woman of remarkable beauty and the means to continue his philandering well into his dotage. Money, as all men know, is what keeps a campaign alive.

Deborah had no knowledge of the man save such details as people had seen fit to intimate to her. Yet one glimpse of the fellow — who positively reeked of debauchery — would have stirred invincible repugnance in the most unworldly girl alive. Our very being protests unbidden when brought near to what might prove our ruin, just as lips draw back from the poisoned cup.

Barely delivered from the unctuous forwardness of her appointed swain, Deborah stole from the salon and made directly for her own quarters. There she made swift work of casting off her festive fal-lals, struck light to several candles which she positioned close by the latticed windows, drew a cloak about her person, and then — moving upon tiptoe with bated breath — crept down to the garden, where the darkness swallowed her whole.

Every so often, Lord Cockermouth would pull forth his watch in the salon: he might have been strapped to a

torturer's chair for all the ease he showed, and he took no share in any of the talk. On the stroke of a quarter to nine he arose and threaded his way through the little parties of talkers, his eyes roaming across the company as though he were taking a tacit census of them; after which he left the room and repaired to the second courtyard within.

"Who's walking about? Is it you, my commodore?"

"Ah! It's you, Chris. Low, man, low. Ready? The hour's upon us."

"Ready, commodore."

"Have you brought your piece?"

"Primed to the brim, commodore."

"You've seen her?"

"Not I, sir."

"She's quit the drawing-room."

"There — see her windows alight? She'll be making her preparations, I'll warrant."

"Go shut the East Tower wicket and the great corridor door — that'll cage her nicely. Not a sound. Quick about it. I'll stay here."

"All shut fast now, sir."

"Capital! Come along — the yew walk."

"Blast and damn! Commodore, heaven's being stingy with the lights tonight: I might as well have my eyes in the back of my head."

"Silence."

Once they had gained the extremity of the grounds, they mounted a circular platform that jutted from one of the angles; this was an ancient turret, almost levelled and banked up with soil within; two pathways crossed each other at its base.

"Someone coming, commodore — yonder, on the Killarney way."

"Do you not see something pacing there?... Chris, not so far over the wall, man — you'll betray us."

"It's him!"

"He's approaching. See him well enough?"

"Plain enough to strike his heart!"

"Fire, man! Have you lost your nerve, Chris?"

"Aye, my commodore — afraid I'll miss.... Hah!... Got him in the belly!"

"Good shot! Well done!"

"Time to end it!" Chris exclaimed, vaulting into the pathway.

His lordship kept his position hunched over the wall, watching his servant go about the work, heaping abuse on his victim and uttering blasphemies against God.

"God damn it! My commodore, what life these Papists have in 'em! Well, Mister Pat, too proud to drink with Englishmen, were you? But you'd.... There! You hear that?... That's Chris ripping your guts!..."

"Courtesy of Lord Cockermouth."

"Going halves, we are. Had your fill?"

"Clubbing him won't end it. Chris — here, take my sword."

"There! There! There! Still alive, are you?"

"Leave off, Chris! Like a buffoon you are — wasting time on a dead man. There's nine o'clock: they'll be wanting me for the banquet. Wipe the sword — hand it here; and go put on fresh clothes."

His lordship came back into the drawing-room, offered apologies for his brief withdrawal, and requested that his guests would be pleased to repair to the banqueting hall. The hall was of prodigious extent, reaching through the castle from front to back and debouching into the garden by a grand sweep of steps spreading fanwise. Between the ribs of the lancet ceiling stars were strewn across a field of deepest blue. Oak wainscoting, carved in a rough fashion, lined the

walls. Rust-eaten partisans and pieces of ancient armour hung upon the pillars standing between the tall windows with their stone tracery and stained glass.

A table accommodating a hundred and fifty was laid the length of the gallery, appointed with a splendour fit for royalty. Midway along the board sat Lord Cockermouth facing the Countess; to her left a seat had been kept for Deborah, whom her amiable bridegroom-to-be was forever enquiring after. The Countess growing considerably anxious about the absence as well, the Earl summoned Chris and told him, with several knowing looks: "See whether my daughter mightn't be in her apartment, and chide her for her want of manners."

Looking utterly confounded, Chris was back in a moment, calling out: "My commodore, the young lady's not to be found!"

Cockermouth started in surprise. Chris stepped up to him and said under his breath: "But the doors were shut fast, and the candles burning still...."

At this he paled, and his arm, stretched out to take hold of a flagon, dropped nerveless to the table.

All the company took note of their host's strange perturbation.

XI.

Lord Cockermouth and Chris had only just quitted their victim when Patrick, all unknowing, arrived at the spot where they had agreed to meet, his route taking him along the deep-cut road from Killarney. Drawing closer to the terrace, his anxious heart thrilled with a transport of joy: in the stillness, a gentle murmur of breath and sighing stole upon his hearing like a caress.

"TO BE!…" he called out — but the rallying-phrase went unanswered, no voice taking up its conclusion. "TO BE!" said he once more, and with greater urgency.

A ghastly rattle issued from below, close by his boots, and he heard a voice at the point of death breathe forth: "Or not to be."

"Who is it that replies? Can it be the shade of Hamlet, or are you there, Deborah?"

In that instant he made out a form stretched athwart the way, and with a cry dropped to his knees: "Debby — murdered!"

Lying in a pool of her own blood, her face was buried against the ground where she had fallen. Gently he raised her and settled her upon the grass, bearing her weight in his arms, his lips seeking her shuttered eyes as though his kisses might restore her to life.

"Debby! My sweet Debby! Turn your eyes to Patrick. It is I — I, your own true heart! Can you hear what I say? Speak to me — where are you bleeding?"

"Patrick? Oh no — is it you? Fly from here — the villains will take your life too!"

"Who are they?"

"Get away from here! Can you not see them watching? They will have your life! Run!... Your death is sworn."

"Be not frightened. Tell me where they have injured you, that I may bind it up!... Say — do you know the men who attacked you?"

"It is no use, Patrick. My time has come — I have only to die now. Do not press me for their names! Certain things must not be spoken — this secret is mine and heaven's only. My dearest friend, grant me forgiveness and your blessing before I go! Oh, forgive me this! When I was shot down a

moment ago, a dreadful suspicion entered my mind, and the memory of it freezes me with shame — yes, you must hear it! In my heart I charged you with my death — oh, how base and thankless I have shown myself! Had my slayers given no sign of themselves, I would have died thinking it was your doing. Patrick, say you will not curse me for this!"

"Horrible! I, to have murdered you, Deborah? There is no faith in you toward me, Debby — this suspicion is the work of the doubt that reigns in your soul."

"Nay, Patrick — it was born of my disordered wits and the violence of my pain."

"This is no time to speak of wrongs, Deborah. I love you, and all is forgiven. Yours is my soul! Yours my blood! Yours my very life! Say what I must do — tell me! Who were they? You must tell me! I know now what it is to desire murder — for the first time! For the first time my soul brims over with the thirst for vengeance! I must obliterate them! I will have their blood!"

"Patrick, in this you forget your Maker."

These unadorned words had power to quell his passion in a single stroke and chase away his frenzied state.

"There is healing in your voice, Debby — a balm that quiets all; and your speech comes as dew upon parched ground. You seem to be recovering your strength, Debby?

Doubtless your wounds are not so terrible as you had thought? You must not lie here longer unsuccoured — say where I am to take you."

"In truth, I am better; the shot took me merely in the leg; and darkness was my salvation against the steel — it spared me nearly all their cuts. Help me up, that is all I ask; I have vigour enough remaining to make my way to the castle. Yet you, my own Patrick — for Heaven's sake I beg of you, fly from here! There is no safety for you here — they are after your blood, do you not hear me? They imagined they were cutting you down when their weapons found me. Fly!"

"Fly! Take flight? And wherefore? To escape death? Never — let her come if she will! I will meet her rejoicing. Of what use is life to me if you are not in it?"

"For the love of God, Patrick, hearken to what I ask of you. A stranger abroad requires means — here, take this jewel-case I brought with me, and set out for France, just as we had planned to do, you and I. As I am, I cannot go with you; but have faith in what I swear — no sooner shall I have recovered a little of my force than I will make my way to your side."

"Abandon you and fly? Better death by far!"

"Listen to what I beg of you — this land holds nothing for you now but danger; remain and you court destruction,

both for yourself and for me. Should you escape tonight, tomorrow will see you murdered! Of what consequence is it that you reach France a little before me? Leave now, and see that all is arranged for my welcome, for welcoming her who is to be your spouse."

"But what if obstructions should arise to thwart your journey to me in my banished state?"

"No such thing is possible now, Patrick; circumstances have shifted entirely — no more hiding and escaping for me; I shall go forth openly, in the light of day, with everyone watching. My days of trembling are past; the tables are turned — it is I now who shall make others tremble."

"You have let slip your secret, Debby — I have discovered your murderer, who was to have been mine also; you named him without meaning to: the very man who made you tremble... He has spilt blood of his own blood! He has murdered his own child! It is your own father!"

"Aid me to make my way, friend, and see me to the gate of the grounds."

"How dreadfully you must be suffering, my poor love — do not strain yourself to keep it hidden; breathe out your sighs, shed your tears freely. Good God, what an endless procession of woes I bring crashing down upon her! You see I spoke truly: I am a creature under a blight, baleful and

doomed. In my fond embrace I have done nothing but tie you to a great weight that shall draw you ever deeper into ruin. Heed me in this — we must divide our fortunes: let happiness be yours, and mine be filled with torment! Banishment from my fatherland I will accept, but do me the mercy of forgetting — do not pursue me into exile, do not tie the radiant thread of your destiny to my shroud of grief!"

"In my hour of greatest need for consolation, such is your idea of comfort — yes, by all means crush my spirit, Patrick, feed me on bitterness! Pat, there is danger of your being observed — you must leave me here; I am already in the grand approach. Look there — do you see how the casements of the long room blaze with tapers? Does the chime of glassware reach your ears, and all that noisy mirth? That short distance I can cover perfectly well on my own. Let me have but a stick from a tree to keep me steady as I go. Farewell, Patrick, farewell! Be at peace — my love lies beyond the reach of absence, of time, or of any earthly distance. Whithersoever you journey, there my soul will attend you. Farewell! Ere many days pass I shall be beside you."

"Farewell, Debby! For you alone I shall live — and, if Providence so ordains, for you alone through endless ages!"

"How will I know where to find you once I am in Paris?"

"A practical arrangement must be made — but what form should it take? Along the side of the Louvre that gives onto the Seine, somewhere near the sixth pilaster, I shall scratch my name and my lodgings into the stonework."

Then did their lips meet and remain locked together through a lengthy space. The anguish of that kiss caused Deborah to faint away, and she fell back into Patrick's embrace as he reeled and steadied himself against one of the linden trees lining the drive. Finally they wrenched themselves apart from one another.

Patrick retraced his steps up the leafy arcade, weeping without restraint and finding solace in it; for he had driven down every impulse of despair into the depths of his heart, unwilling to place yet another burden upon his love.

Weep on, wretched Patrick! Allow yourself that solace! Bewail your fortune, for surely no crueller exists. Unhappy youth! At but twenty years to run away alone from your own country, wet with tears and dyed crimson with your sweetheart's blood!

Deborah, stooped over her makeshift crutch, crept laboriously toward the great house. She had suppressed all sign of her anguish and used up her last reserves of courage to keep Patrick ignorant of how terrible her injuries were. Her

hurts had not ceased to bleed. Each pace she took saw her growing feebler.

The festivities were well under way. Lord Cockermouth feigned high spirits and geniality with such little skill that his distraction and vexation showed through all the more plainly. Guests had caught him on repeated occasions murmuring privately to Chris. The Lady moved about in the extremity of agitation; she had herself gone looking for Deborah in her chambers and every corner of the castle, and had had her called for several times in the garden and out in the grounds. Each and every guest had taken note that she was not there and spoke of it with knowing, secretive looks. Much that was venomous and sneering made the rounds from guest to guest. The would-be husband, matched with an empty chair, cut a distinctly uncomfortable figure: he was at a loss to explain his bride-to-be's disappearance and was taxing his mind to identify whatever it was in his character that might have provoked so powerful a repugnance.

Of a sudden, amid a brief quiet, there came from outside the deadened sound of footsteps on the stone terrace; the whole company looked that way at once, and a complete calm took hold.

The door trembled and gave way, flexing as if pressed upon by a bodily weight.

"That's her!" people cried out on all sides. "It's her! Someone open it!"

Chris thereupon dashed to the door and threw it open full width. The room erupted with cries of shock and frightful consternation.

Deborah came in, deathly white and drenched in blood, her whole person in horrifying disarray. She staggered forward a few steps further, then collapsed heavily upon the paving stones. Fright was now at its zenith. The Countess, out of her wits and pouring forth moans and despairing shrieks, had flung herself onto her daughter's prostrate figure, all but stifling her beneath a storm of embraces. The Earl sent for the manservants and caused Deborah to be borne off. The gathering was seized with utter confusion: the guests, frightened out of their wits, forsook their seats and bolted with such precipitate speed that they knocked into and hurt one another. Lord Cockermouth, he alone, showed steadiness and presence of mind, and he made efforts to keep the fleeing party from leaving.

"Come now, let us all return to our seats, I entreat you? This is no more than an unlucky incident, which will come to nothing grave — surely it need not spoil our merrymaking. Do be seated again, ladies, I implore you."

Heedless of his lordship's pleading, the throng kept departing.

"I beg you, sirs, be seated! From whom do you fly? Who has put you to flight? Can it be my daughter Deborah's accident? Believe me, I am as deeply afflicted as any of you. What a wretched business! Nevertheless, let us see the entertainment through. Sit down to dinner, I say! Are you listening, sirs? These tokens of compassion you display for my daughter affect me, but your courtesy, your sentiment, is carried to extremes. Do you mean to desert me solitary at the very feast I have laid on in your honour? Gentlemen, you are not to go! Are you afraid for your own dear selves? This is not a brigand's cave, I fancy! You are the guests of the lord and master of Cockermouth Castle, a soldier of long service, and you do him outrage! Ah, sirs, you inflict upon me the grossest indignity, the most barbarous slight — you repudiate your host and spurn the hospitality of his table! You offer indignity to these white locks of mine and bring shame upon the renown of my bloodline! You are not to leave this place, do you hear me — I will not permit it — unless you can justify this unconscionable discourtesy toward your host! Yet no — you are nothing but a pack of spineless wretches! Away! Be off with you! I order it — you besmirch my castle, I am mortified by the sight of you!"

Screaming these final imprecations, the Earl, white-lipped and foaming with indignation and wounded pride, unsheathed his blade and swept it menacingly about him as he pressed forward upon the dinner party now cowering by the exit. One among their number, a greybeard, came deliberately forward and spoke to him with an artfully cryptic manner: "My lord, your blade bears bloodstains."

Upon hearing this, thunderstruck as if by a bolt from heaven, Cockermouth turned chill, checked himself instantly and let the weapon slip from his hand — the steel still scarlet with Deborah's lifeblood.

BOOK THE SECOND.

XII.

Once beyond Deborah's sight, Patrick sank into a despair absolute and consuming: for her he knew no hope, for himself none, and none either for the days to come or for existence at large. Ought he to go, ought he to stay? How was he to decide? Only a poltroon would desert a friend at the point of death, only a poltroon would turn tail before the daggers of cut-throats. But if death should claim her, what then? He could not come nigh her final bed, could not sit watch and shed tears over her; not in his arms, not 'neath his kisses would her last breath be drawn: nothing would remain to him save to cry out in the lane like a dog before the door of the dwelling wherein his master breathes his last. And yet suppose the poniard laid him low whilst God in His mercy raised her up... Merciless choice! What was he to do? Which path was he to choose?

Unable to decide, unable to resolve, a captive to this torment of indecision, he wandered abroad and roved hither and thither like some prowling wolf throughout the open lands of Killarney. In an instant his energies, wholly depleted, gave out; his legs buckled under him, and he fell into insensibility under the burden of a sleep heavy as lead.

He woke to find the brightness of the risen day beating upon his sight: the sun was burnishing with gold the rocky peaks of the Devil's Gorge and the castle's towers and lofty curtain-walls at Cockermouth. In amazement his glance roved without direction around him: he was stretched at the base of an arbutus beside the deep waters of the lake, ice-cold in his cloak that was sodden with the night fogs and drenched in dew. By degrees his benumbed members loosened their stiffness, and he raised himself up, tottering as one wholly spent and suffering in every sinew.

Night's vigil had resolved his doubt: with no further wavering he put Cockermouth Castle behind him and struck out into the distance.

The second morning after, at the self-same hour, he found himself leaning upon the forepart of a sloop that was standing out from Waterford; he bade his adieux to verdant Erin, to Ireland, his ill-starred mother, which grew ever dimmer on the far line of sea and sky, fading as she fades from the roll of nations, whilst from his gaze, fastened upon

the shores of his birth, great tears fell and were swallowed up in the waters of the deep.

As soon as ever he came to Paris, Fitz-Whyte repaired to greet the bulk of his compatriots in French employ: their ranks were not inconsiderable.

These two hundred years past, from the hour of her incorporation into England, Ireland had lain crushed under persecutions of the most barbarous kind; every effort she had made to snap her fetters had but fastened and soldered them the tighter; her luckless sons, to fly from that hateful bondage, to cheat either the block or beggary, had taken ship and gone abroad. Thence came that host of Irish soldiers of fortune, of whose courage and brilliance the annals of Europe and transatlantic lands bear witness.

The man amongst them all who welcomed him most cordially and concerned himself most keenly with his fortunes was Monseigneur Arthur-Richard Dillon[1], recently translated from the archiepiscopal see of Toulouse to that of Narbonne, though the title of Archbishop of the Opéra, in partibus infidelium[2], would have suited him more faithfully.

His Grace, for all his beauty, had no more intimate knowledge of those souls committed to his pastoral care than had Prince Louis-René-Édouard de Rohan-Guéméné[3], Bishop

of Canopus, of his notional communicants dwelling at Bochir in Egypt.

His Grace Arthur-Richard was born at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, his lineage running back to Ireland; he retained for that ill-fated soil, drenched with the blood of his forefathers, a tender attachment such as must arise in any heart possessed of warmth and sensibility.

And so, when Fitz-Whyte called for the first time at the prelate's Paris residence and sent in his name as a young pilgrim out of Kerry, despite the quite unseasonable hour and the circumstance that my lord was not yet dressed to receive company, the young Irishman was conducted without delay into the very sleeping-apartment, and there welcomed in the most familiar manner by Monseigneur, attired in nothing but a dimity morning-gown.

The curtains about the sleeping-alcove were scrupulously closed; were it not for a soft noise of breathing that made itself heard thence, and for certain charming little mules and tasteful female vestments lying here and there among the furnishings, one could have fancied the Archbishop deep in pious meditation.

So genial was his reception that Patrick's bashfulness and confusion were speedily put to flight.

"So you are fresh from our beloved country, my young friend," said the Archbishop, taking hold of his hand in a manner most affectionate and making him sit close beside him on the settee; "it is good of you, and I am grateful, that you have recalled me to mind as one of your own people and have attributed to me some fondness for my Irish kindred; that you should seek me out is a token of esteem which honours me and affects me most sensibly. Tell me all without reserve — I place myself entirely at your disposal."

Monseigneur found himself, on this particular morning, in an uncommonly charitable and open-handed disposition: it is well known, and the ablest of poets has put it thus — *Pleasure does so improve the temper of the soul*. Fitz-Whyte unburdened himself at considerable length regarding his miseries, and did so with such natural emotion and appeal that Monseigneur was thoroughly enchanted.

As he spoke, his eyes roamed about in amazement, taking in the sumptuous and decidedly mundane décor of the chamber. How unlike, alack, the miserable condition of the clergy at home in Ireland! What above all else disturbed the order of his thoughts was the spectacle of these womanly trappings strewn amid the sacred accoutrements — amices, mitres, rochets — here a mantilla thrown across a crozier, there underskirts mixed up with a pallium; a solution to the puzzle did suggest itself to him, yet since it would call into

question my lord Dillon's virtue, his guileless nature refused to entertain it.

The enigma cleared itself up all at once: the hangings about the recess were thrust aside, forth came a sportive young lady, and smitten with astonishment at beholding Patrick Fitz-Whyte, she remained stock-still, rapt in admiration of his splendid Ossianic looks.

"Monsieur, you are as handsome without as you are good within!" she declared with feeling. "Your sad history has moved me quite to tears; and here in this foreign soil you have gained already a friend who shall prove herself devotedly constant."

"And likewise a friend," Monseigneur was quick to add, "who proffers you both his aid and his watchful interest."

"Dillon, you have pledged yourself just now in my hearing, and it is a pledge you will be required to fulfil," declared the charming creature, fondling him and kissing him on the forehead; "it is a sacred promise, and I shall take care to remind you should it slip your mind. Monsieur becomes from this instant my particular protégé...."

"And your grateful servant, Madame," Patrick breathed with shy reserve.

His Grace pressed him to call again very soon, giving him his word that at whatever time he came the door would stand

open. Then Patrick knelt upon one knee to place a kiss upon the episcopal emerald and to implore his blessing, and this he received in a spirit of pious composure.

The goodwill of Monseigneur Dillon proved undiminished in all their subsequent meetings: Patrick invariably found him as solicitous as ever on his behalf. There is good reason to think, in all honesty, that the lady Philidore, having been smitten with a genuine regard for Fitz-Whyte, had her hand in encouraging such constancy.

There exist no souls more bountiful, more keenly alive to feeling, more ready with compassion than those of women of ill fame: long used to obeying without reckoning or restriction all the urgings of their hearts, all their natural tendencies, all their spontaneous inclinations — to living under the governance of their impressions and yielding themselves up to the full force of their sentiments — they practise virtue just as they practise vice. If they give up their flesh as fare to watermen, they likewise shed sweet unguents and their tears upon Our Lord's feet.

Though a peasant's son, Patrick — who sprang from a family of noble lineage brought to ruin by rapine and forfeiture — gained admission not long thereafter to the Musketeers, armed with the warmest commendations to the commanding officer and enjoying the eminent patronage of Monseigneur Arthur-Richard Dillon, of Fitz-Gerald (a

brigadier), of O'Connor, of O'Dunne, of the Count O'Kelly, of my Lord the Earl of Roscommon, of Lord Dunkell, of Count Hamilton, of my Lord the Earl Airly-O'Gilvy (all of them maréchaux-de-camp[4]), together with that of the Duke of Fitz-James.

With backing of this order, he discovered his commanding officer, M. de Gave de Villepastour, to be replete with civility, goodwill, obliging courtesies, and thoughtful attentions.

Being a foreigner who could scarcely make himself understood in French, flung without so much as a day's preparation into a novel walk of life that bore no resemblance whatsoever to the life he had led hitherto, Patrick would have been most wretchedly alone and out of countenance, and would beyond question have had a great deal to suffer from all the sly cunning and knavery peculiar to military men, had not fortune willed that he should discover within this very regiment an old playmate from his boyhood days — Fitz-Harris, whose uncle was Fitz-Harris, the Abbot of Saint-Spire at Corbeil.

So unexpected a reunion filled Patrick with the liveliest joy; he lavished upon this comrade from bygone days every manner of caress and proof of amity, and these were kindly received, the fellow engaging to give him both his faithful service and his advice.

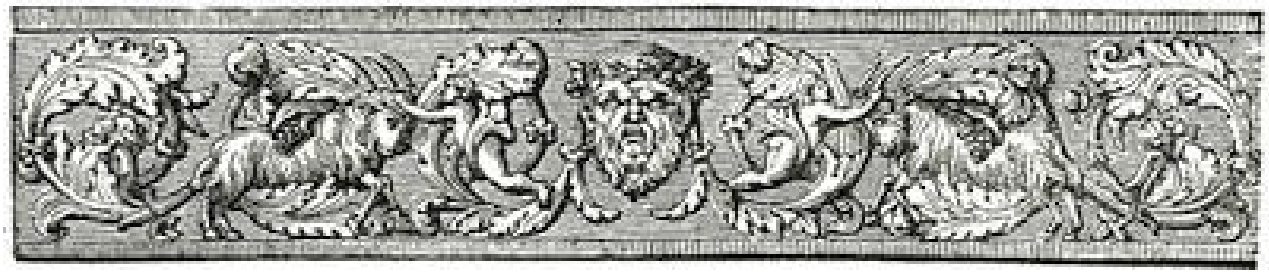
[1] Arthur Richard Dillon (1721–1806), of Irish Jacobite descent, rose through the French Church to become Archbishop of Narbonne (1763–90) and Primate of Gallia Narbonensis. He invested heavily in civic improvements—bridges, canals, roads, and university chairs in Montpellier and Toulouse—while presiding over the estates of Languedoc. His long liaison with his niece, Madame de Rothe, was a source of scandal. Refusing the Civil Constitution of the Clergy in 1790, he emigrated first to Coblenz and then to London, where he died in exile. His remains, initially buried at St Pancras Old Church, were later reinterred in Narbonne Cathedral.

[2] *In partibus infidelium* (Latin for "in the parts of the infidels") is a historical Catholic phrase used to designate bishops who were assigned to titular sees rather than functioning dioceses. It described a bishop without a real flock, serving instead as an assistant or papal delegate.

[3] Cardinal Louis de Rohan (1734–1803) was perhaps the finest example of a churchman who was, at heart, anything but.

Born into one of France's most powerful noble families, he inherited a bishopric almost as a birthright, yet consistently preferred Parisian salons to pastoral duties. His political meddling in Vienna earned him the lasting contempt of both Empress Maria Theresa and her daughter Marie Antoinette, a grudge that would shadow his entire career. Desperate to claw back royal favor, he became the most famous dupe in French history — manipulated into believing the Queen herself wanted him to secretly broker the purchase of an outrageously expensive diamond necklace. She did not. Tried before the Paris parlement in 1786, his acquittal drew jubilant crowds, less out of sympathy for the Cardinal than out of sheer delight at the embarrassment of the crown. He ended his days in quiet German exile, having outlived his scandal, his fortune, and his relevance — though not, apparently, his conscience, as he spent his final years supporting impoverished clergy driven from France by the Revolution.

[4] *Maréchal de camp* (sometimes incorrectly translated as field marshal) was a general officer rank used by the French Army until 1848. The rank originated from the older rank of sergeant major general (French: *sergent-major général*). Sergeant major general was third in command in an army, after the general and the lieutenant general. One of his tasks was to dispose the troops on the battlefield. It was also known in the French army as the "battle sergeant" (fr: *sergent de bataille*). In English-speaking countries, the rank of sergeant major general became known as simply major general.



XIII.

Lady Cockermouth did not long survive the horrors of that fatal banquet — a sanguineous congestion presently stopped her breath and killed her. The blow to her senses proved of such force that it had unseated her reason altogether.

Deborah, given up for lost in the beginning, was gradually regaining her strength; she besought them continually to fetch her poor mother to her side, having no knowledge as yet of her loss. They put her off with assurances: "A serious illness keeps your mother abed; when she is somewhat improved, you shall see her directly."

The studied falseness and evident discomfort of all who answered her thus had roused her alarm and kindled in her breast a sinister conjecture — too dreadful to speak of, but devouring her from within. Daily her entreaties grew more urgent; daily she received the same hollow reassurances. The

fatal truth broke upon her when several domestics, all in black, showed themselves thoughtlessly in her presence; yet she betrayed nothing of her sorrow, and watching her opportunity, at a moment when her attendant happened to quit the room, she forced herself from her sickbed and — weak as she was — made her painful way, clinging to the walls for support, towards the chamber where her mother lay. Once inside, apprehension closed around her heart: it thudded so savagely against her breast she thought she must be killed by it, while her lungs refused their office.... All was dust-covered and forsaken, cold and still as the grave.... Not a soul!... The drapes were pulled about the bedstead!... Asleep, perhaps!... Step by cautious step she made her way to the bedside, then slowly, so slowly, drew aside the fabric: the couch lay untenant and void!... No one there!... A single piercing shriek tore from her throat; then darkness took her, and she knew no more.

The castle had been searched through all its chambers before anyone thought to look in that room, where she lay insensible on the flooring, icy to the touch and expiring. The injuries she had sustained opened once more; her condition took a perilous turn, and what hope there was of healing became fainter still.

That Patrick Fitz-Whyte had been made away with, none could doubt, seeing he had disappeared entire and the path to Killarney bore unmistakable signs of violence. Such tidings

struck fear into every heart within reach of Cockermouth Castle. The question upon every lip was: What man had done this bloody deed? That Patrick had been keeping company with the daughter of the house was no secret among the peasantry; and their honest, homely judgement having ever told them no good would come of it, they knew perfectly well what to think in the privacy of their own hearts: one person only had aught to gain by making away with Patrick; but they trembled even to breathe aloud that execrable name.

The banqueting-hall affair was quickly noised about: the bulk of the gentlefolk in attendance cherished for Lord Cockermouth a contempt and loathing no whit inferior to that of the peasants; and since no prudence restrained their tongues as it did those of the peasantry, they let it be known far and wide that the earl had caught Patrick and Deborah in a clandestine rendezvous, had made an end of him and dealt her a near-fatal blow; moreover, that he had appeared before the whole gathering in a towering passion, brandishing a sword fouled yet with blood from his villainous work. The story put steel into the convictions of the peasants and made them bold to say aloud what before they had scarcely dared to think.

The Irish peasantry, like their brethren in Spain, observe to this hour an old Celtic rite: whosoever walks by a place where one has perished or lies interred will gather a stone and

fling it piously down; in this fashion, stone piled upon stone raises up a cairn of no small height, which time and weather dress at last in soil and greenery, till it might pass for any common rise in the landscape. These witnesses to the godly customs of former times are to be met with even in France, chiefly throughout the Breton country. Men of science catalogue them as Gaulish, Celtic, or Druidic antiquities; and notwithstanding that excavation has repeatedly yielded up remnants of human skeletons, these worthy gentlemen cannot for the life of them agree upon how these tumuli[1] came to be.

There stands yet, along the Killarney path, the cairn raised upon the bloodied earth where Deborah fell; folk speak of it still as the tomb of Mac-Phadruig, or the lover's tomb.

Such clamour rose up then against Lord Cockermouth, so general and so direct, that he deemed he could not with safety bear it any longer, and that he must needs wash himself clean before the public eye — by any expedient whatsoever — of the monstrous deed of which he stood accused. Malice went so far as to lay at his door the poisoning of his own wife; and he dared not appear outside his castle gates without being assailed by the mockery of urchins, who shrieked at him pitilessly: "Lord Cain! Lord Cain! Where have you put Patrick?"

Through guileful stratagems he contrived to tear from Deborah's lips what she had hidden: that Fitz-Whyte survived and in what retreat he sheltered; this done, he placed the matter in the hands of Justice, impeaching him formally as the man who had sought to kill his child.

The business falling to be tried at the Tralee[2] sessions, which were to begin in early March, thither he hauled poor Debby, who had only just begun to regain her strength.

It so fell out that they came to Tralee upon the self-same day that the judges rode into town to open the sessions.

The docket awaiting these worthies was respectable enough: Patrick's affair aside, they were charged with dispatching some six cases of murder and a round dozen of larceny, though in truth these dangerous Irish cut-throats were no more, God help them, than decent Catholic peasants guilty of the enormity of striking back when their English tenants beat them with sticks, and these egregious brigands were naught but wretched families cast into destitution by the latest seizures of property, who in their hunger and freezing want had made off with a few creels of peat and several pecks of potatoes.

Deborah happened to be standing with her father on the balcony of the inn when the two judges — justices — rode past en route to the courthouse — Master Templeton and

Master Gunnerspoole they were called — gotten up in full and foppish dress of white satin trimmed with pink flounces, their monstrous periwigs dusted to a chalky whiteness. Their retinue was made up of the mayor, the civic functionaries, and liveried lackeys dressed in white, each sporting a great posy at his breast. A tabor and a fife would have been all that was needed to lend the finishing touch of ribaldry to the spectacle.

All the townsfolk were abroad with welcoming glances and smiling faces, as lively as on a gala day; the streets, dressed in their finery, teemed with white-clad elegantes, prosperous tradesmen in blue, and soldiers in their red regimentals.

When the assizes are held in country towns, the throng that flocks in for the hearing of civil and criminal causes makes it a season of market-day revelry.

The judges, marking the Earl of Cockermouth at his window, paid him a handsome salute. In order to procure their connivance in perverting justice, he had presented himself at their lodgings the instant they arrived and had courted their goodwill with tireless zeal. Their mutual devotion to the bottle and the trencher had quickly forged a brotherhood of sorts; they took their supper together almost every night, and made no sparing meal of it.

The dapper dress and cheerful countenances of these justices filled Deborah with wonder, she having never previously beheld a judge: that such persons were in the business of condemning men to die she found quite beyond belief. Master Templeton and Gunnerspoole were high-coloured, well-fed, gross, sausage-fingered and burly. These men, she told herself, must have the most complete assurance of their own unerring judgement, since plainly neither doubt nor compunction nor remorse preys upon their minds. No less painfully did Deborah find herself astonished by the cheerfulness of the populace, provoked by the simple fact that men had arrived whose business it was to thin their ranks. The populace must have its shows; all that affords it spectacle is welcome: clerics, soldiers, jugglers, judges, crowned heads, and the men who swing the rope.

Patrick's case was the second matter brought before the bench. Lord Cockermouth's accusation ran thus: that this Patrick had seduced his daughter, drawn her into a scheme of elopement wherein she should bring her jewels and diamonds, cut her throat at the trysting-place fixed for their flight, and absconded to France with all her valuables to escape the blade of Justice.

The suborned witnesses, bought up lavishly, acquitted themselves of their office admirably; they brought a truly painstaking scruple to the business of justifying their fee.

Two incontrovertible facts supplied fatal corroboration to the indictment; the disappearance of Deborah's gems and diamonds, together with the billet found inside the steel casket that Chris had dug from the earth — which document Cockermouth asserted he had discovered among his daughter's effects. Few were the words it carried, but of what damning import!

"Some hours yet, and then we are God's only: our freedom is at hand! Until the morrow, my dear Deborah — as is agreed between us, whatsoever chances — at nine precisely by the terrace below, in that sunken Killarney way; come with an easy heart, your Patrick will be there to meet you. In all the distraction of getting away, forget not to bring what valuables you have; I shudder at the idea of seeing you in need."

Confronted with a choice of unspeakable anguish — powerless to clear her lover save by unmasking her father, and powerless to protect her father save by destroying her lover — Deborah entrenched herself immovably behind this shadowy denial: "Patrick is guiltless, Patrick has not robbed me or attempted my life. My father did not kill Patrick, since Patrick is safe in France." Try as they might, they could not tear one more syllable from her.

After certain trivial points had been aired, the Court, considering its mind sufficiently made up, retired promptly to confer, and with equal dispatch — for dinner was not far off

— handed down its verdict condemning Patrick by default, found guilty of seduction, elopement, larceny, and murder, to be hanged by the neck.

As the decree was being read, Deborah sank to her knees there in open court, crying: "Spare Patrick, he has done nothing!..."

The justices declared the sitting at an end, and the Earl had his swooning daughter taken from the room.

Come evening, the two judges made haste to attend the princely supper his lordship had laid on to mark the signal decree of their sagacious and incorruptible tribunal. He carried his brutality to such a pitch as to insist that Deborah should be there, but she rose up in open revolt and would not show herself.

Yet all the night she had perforce to endure, lying abed in her wretchedness, the sound of their raucous laughter, their wild and reckless speech, their brothel-like jollity.

With the first light she got up without a noise. Her way out lay through the banqueting-room where they had caroused: the tableau before her left her purpose unshaken, but it filled her with anguished compassion. The two judges, drunk past consciousness, had rolled themselves beneath the table; Chris lay swaddled in the tablecloth amongst a pile of

bottles; and her father, besmeared with vomit, in a state of Noachian disorder, slept sprawled upon the tiles.

Finding room in a public conveyance about to leave, she got in, meaning to put Tralee behind her as swiftly as she could and proceed to Dingle, where she had reason to hope she might find ships making ready to cross to France.

It was not many days after she had gone from Tralee that, the Assizes being over, they hanged an effigy of Patrick Fitz-Whyte in the principal square.

[1] *A tumulus* (plural: tumuli) is an artificial mound of earth or stones raised over a grave or burial site. They are also commonly referred to as burial mounds, barrows, or *kurgans*, and are found throughout the world to commemorate the dead.

[2] Tralee is a town in County Kerry, in southwestern Ireland.

XIV.

So entirely was Deborah given over to the anxious happiness of beholding Patrick once more that she travelled through Normandy with eyes unseeing, even as a lovelorn youth walks the streets in a dream, bound for his sweetheart's door. What was Dieppe to her — Saint-Jacques and Le Pollet[1] and all the ivory-workers besides! The valley of Arques, its fortress and its broken walls — these were nothing to her! Little enough did Rouen matter, for all its Saint-Ouen and its famed Bourg-Théroulde[2]! What cared she for Gisors[3], its church and its tower! Of what consequence were the sweet-scented orchards of apple, the wooden dwellings, the solitary heights, the lovely cerulean heavens above those vales! Patrick alone was the object of her soul's yearning; her motionless stare endeavoured to break through that dispiriting horizon only to fall spent at his feet. That she should see and not share the sight with Patrick, that she should feel and he be absent, that she should admire

whilst he was away — this would have been wrong, if indeed it could have been at all. Only two hearts may journey thus, solitary and contemplative, through the world — the barren heart and the broken: the first to fill what is wanting, the second to blur what is remembered.

The clock was striking one in the morning as the diligence drew up to the gates of Paris: from the very heart of the night there rose to Deborah's hearing the nightingale's voice lift in song. This musical carolling — seeming at once a greeting and a divine portent of happiness to come — stole luxuriantly over her spirit and drove forth the mournful musings that had beset her. Not since those final meetings after nightfall, not since every particle of joy had been torn from her, not since her woes had reached their height, had she heard the nightingale's song — the *rossin-ceol*; but now she imagined herself back in that blessed time when she had known such fair nights in Patrick's company, perched beside the rushing waters among the Devil's Gorge rocks, or roaming through the spiky broom of Dove-Dale — the turtle-dove's own valley — her soul exalted by nature's glories and by the sacred rites of friendship.

With the earliest light of dawn, Deborah emerged from the inn, a lad from the Messageries accompanying her as guide; anxiety had consumed her through the night, and not even the exhaustion of travel had been able to close her eyes

upon the bed where she had flung herself down. Arriving at the Quai du Louvre, a fierce agitation seized her as she beheld the gallery stretching away beside the Seine; the lengthy and otherwise undistinguished frontage — barring a few false ornaments — spread itself out before her vision like some vast scroll of papyrus, and she swept her gaze along it, seeking the one hieroglyph to which she alone possessed the key. What was voiceless stone to the passing crowd became articulate for her — a voice either caressing or cruel, a pronouncement that sat in judgment upon her fate.

One, two, three, four, five.... The pilasters pass beneath her counting gaze: then, in a sudden rush, joy floods through her — she catches sight, close by the sixth, of marks scratched into one of the lower stones, just as had been their understanding; she moves closer and makes out the words: *Patrick Fitz-Whyte, hôtel des Mousquetaires*. The headiness of it sets her swaying and stammering; all sense and seemliness abandon her; she showers kisses upon that trusty wall which has kept their secret, draws her soft hand lovingly over the inscription, caresses it; tears come, and smiles too; Irish words tumble from her lips; she drops to her knees and offers up a prayer.... Next moment she is scratching a hasty message in her pocket-book, which she hands to the dumbfounded lad: "Go now, I pray you," she instructs him, "without delay, to the hôtel des Mousquetaires; you are to ask for M. Patrick

Fitz-Whyte and hand this to him directly — to him alone; do what you can to bring him along with you. I go back to the inn."

After losing herself several times in the streets, she came back to find Patrick already there, and he had been waiting no little while; like creatures possessed they sprang into one another's arms and blended their weeping with their ecstasy in a kiss of exquisite sweetness. The gentlest of endearments were theirs to give and receive, murmuring to each other in the language of love's most perfect innocence. After the violence of their first embrace, Patrick's eye fell upon Deborah's widow's weeds; a shadow passed over his joy, which now found itself invaded by mournful feelings and by remorse. Deborah stood drinking in the elegance of her friend's person; the musketeer's surcoat showed his handsome form to wonderful effect and displayed his beautiful fair head with every possible advantage.

Over their morning meal they took turns relating all that had been significant in their lives, all the events that had come to pass since they had parted. So that neither sorrow nor despair should touch Phadruig's heart, Deborah held back a single piece of intelligence — beseeching Heaven that he might never learn of it — namely, the verdict delivered by the judges at Tralee, and the sentence of death by hanging to which they had condemned him.

Before the day was out, Patrick had arranged quarters for Deborah — a little set of rooms at the hôtel Saint-Papoul in the rue de Verneuil.

Their first and most eager concern was to render thanks to the Lord for having protected them in their flight and granted them this reunion, and to implore Him to bless the bond between them, to have them in His keeping — for they were young and friendless, thrown upon a strange and profligate shore — and to commit them to the care of His Angels, so that these might steer them clear of every temptation to sin and preserve them safe whithersoever they should go. In this manner they spent the whole of the evening at their devotions, kneeling in a dusky chapel of the Saint-Germain-des-Prés abbey; the church stood peaceful and forsaken around them, and a single lamp burned in silent communion with their watch.

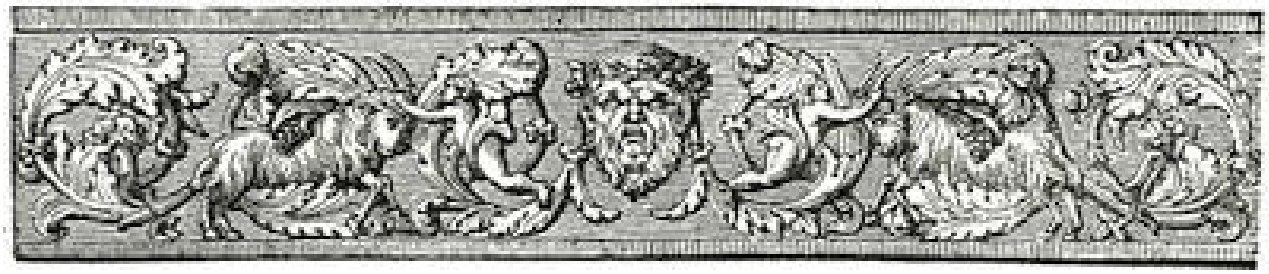
Whatever time Patrick possessed, whatever respite from his military service he could secure, belonged entirely to Deborah: he used these precious hours at her side to savour those inexhaustible joys — the joys of love, of companionship, of keeping house together, of their sequestered life. Fitz-Harris called upon them but seldom, whether to take dinner or to spend an hour or two in their society. Their connexion had grown decidedly cold, and had been cooling for a good long time. Patrick's enjoyment of the

colonel's favour, and the conspicuous tokens of esteem lavished upon him, had embittered Fitz-Harris's heart, which was by nature prone to envy. His handsome looks, his brilliance of mind, his erudition — these all provoked Fitz-Harris's envy, and so too did Deborah. Patrick had swiftly come to understand, for his own part, that a man so garrulous, so inveterate a raconteur as Fitz-Harris could only be befriended with the greatest caution and circumspection: the fellow was that strange article, a tattling confidant — always in possession of some secret to whisper round, spilling his thoughts to the first comer, gracing the entire world with his intimate disclosures, and frequently betraying — even at great cost to himself, so thoroughly was he in thrall to his narrative compulsion — the most delicate particulars of his private life, which he ought by rights to have buried in his heart's deepest vault.

[1] *Le Pollet*, the seafarers' quarter of Dieppe, is a place whose very identity is inseparable from the water that surrounds it. Nestled on the right bank of the river Arques where it meets the English Channel, it was the Vikings who first grasped the strategic potential of this natural harbour, building upon a gravel spit — a *poulier* — to establish what would grow into one of France's great ports.

[2] *Bourg-Théroulde* (officially Grand-Bourgtheroulde) is a charming commune on the Roumois plateau in Normandy, France. Rich in history and surrounded by nature, it features quaint architecture and the beautiful Église Saint-Ouen. It is famously known as the site of the historic 1124 Battle of Bourgthéroulde.

[3] *Gisors* is a historic town and commune in the Normandy region of northwestern France, famously known as the "Capital of the Vexin Normand". Located about 63 km northwest of Paris, it is a significant site of medieval history, primarily due to its strategic role as a border fortress during the long-standing power struggles between the Dukes of Normandy (Kings of England) and the Kings of France.



XV.

Should the heavens smile upon them, out they would go, betaking themselves to worship in whatever church they had not yet entered, or else to inspect some monument, museum, or public garden; though what pleased them above all else was to wander through the environs of Paris, amongst the forests, the noble residences, the châteaux that lay scattered there. It happened one day, just as they passed into the gardens of the Tuileries, that M. de Gave de Villepastour, the colonel under whom Patrick served, caught sight of them as he took his habitual walk upon the Guards' terrace.

"Now there goes a blessed mortal — this Fitz-Whyte of ours! He banquets with the gods themselves!… D'you mark him down there," said he to Fitz-Harris, who chanced to be standing with him. "Passing with that perfect bouquet hanging from his arm?"

"I beg your pardon, Colonel — what bouquet?"

"What bouquet forsooth!... Dunderpate!... Why, that Egeria[1] yonder! That dryad who is forever at his side! Come now, Fitz-Harris, you are his Pylades[2], are you not? You must certainly know who this ebony-haired nymph might be."

"Ebony-haired, you say?... But Colonel, such a designation scarcely narrows the field! The ebony tribe is prodigiously large. Naturalists, sir, recognise the true ebony, the ebenoxylum, the diospyros, the paralæa, the royena... not to mention, Colonel, ebony that is red, ebony that is green, grey ebony, black ebony, and white ebony besides. I would have us be quite definite, sir — are the nymph's locks of the ebony proper, the ebenoxylum, the diospyros, the paralæa, or the royena persuasion? Is the lady's hair red, green, grey, black, or white?"

"Fitz-Harris, this ill-timed drollery serves no purpose — you aspire, I suppose, to become Fool to the Court? But I must inform you that since l'Angely's death, and that of the blockish Maranzac, buffoon to his late Highness, the son of Louis XIV, the administration of foolishness has been done away with."

"In this age, Colonel, princes see to their follies without assistance."

"More than once I have met with them abroad. The beauty of this creature is positively bewitching! A neck as white as any swan's!..."

"Colonel, pardon me for intruding upon your thought — but am I to understand you have not yet seen the black swans kept by Madame Putiphar at the château de Choisy-le-Roi?"

"I have, certainly — but those birds are of dubious hue, swans of the Court variety. All raillery aside, the girl might be Venus incarnate!..."

"A Venus!... Well then, Colonel, she should serve admirably for Turkish pipe-making."

"Whatever do you mean by that?"

"Meerschaum pipes is what I mean."

"Just so! She is seductive in every particular — the trim waist, those little feet, her alabaster flesh!..."

"Once again, sir, let us be precise — men of science make distinction betwixt alabaster, which runs to brown, and alabastrite, which is white. Were she actually of alabaster skin, I must beg your pardon for saying so, what a detestable hide that would be!"

"Scurvy jester! I am quite bludgeoned by your foolish squibs! Can you have forgotten that you are speaking to M. de

Gave de Villepastour — your superior officer? You are wanting in respect!"

"You are the one wanting, sir... Colonel. Am I some pimp of yours? You would have had me prove false to friendship — I chose not to hear you. But as you insist upon taking this tone — well, she is woman enough to protect herself, and I leave it to her. So here is what you are so determined to learn at any cost: a young Irish lady of distinguished and noble birth, who has fallen in love with Patrick and pursued him to France. Twenty years old, beautiful, and chaste — your classical allusions will serve you poorly here, Colonel, you would do better to look elsewhere. She makes her home at the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, rue de Verneuil, and if a sight of her is what you seek, nothing could be simpler — every Sunday without fail she is at Saint-Germain-des-Prés for the midday Mass."

"All this Roman affectation, Fitz-Harris, and yet you are false to the core! I see it in your look — the covert delight you feel in betraying a man who loves you. You were far more consumed with telling me what you made show of hiding than I was with discovering it. What you have done is a shabby thing. More than once you have endeavoured, under the pretence of amity, to do Patrick harm or lower him in my opinion. An envious coward is all you amount to! It was not

through conduct of this sort that Patrick won my regard — regard that shall never be yours."

Having delivered this verdict, the colonel presented him with his back and strode off. A hard lesson it was — Fitz-Harris took to whistling as he forced himself to stomach it.

M. de Gave de Villepastour, marquis, was born of an incestuous intrigue in the time of the Regency[3]; malicious tongues whispered that the most exalted blood imaginable circulated in his frame. One thing at least was sure — some mighty arm, an arm almost of royal provenance, had pushed him forward from behind the scenes and safeguarded his interests, raising him to colonel's rank notwithstanding that he was but five-and-twenty. Blood will tell in the chase, and chase he certainly did — but with veil and mittens, as it were, meaning that he maintained, even amidst his dissipations, certain proprieties that Court gallants kicked aside without scruple. Even in his excesses there lingered a manner of shame that would have made your thorough-going libertines colour with embarrassment, together with some traditions — I hesitate to dignify them as convictions — of virtue and vice, equity and iniquity, utterly abandoned at Court, and these he owed to his tutor, one of the grand reign's men, whose rigorous instruction had, in the final analysis, accomplished nothing more than the manufacture of a certain type of dissembler. The long and short of it was that M. le marquis

was but a vain popinjay, a would-be gentleman, swarming with affectations of manner and speech, formal to a fault, lavish with flattery, duplicitous, preposterous, and reeking of musk — a two-legged exemplar of Dupaty's Italian Journey[4] or Dumoustier's Mythological Letters to Émilie[5].

Extremely pleased with the particulars Fitz-Harris had divulged, he had berated him so roughly solely to prevent himself from being beholden for the treachery, and to strike a pose of offended dignity before a fellow incapable of putting any rein upon his mockery.

On the Sunday next ensuing, upon the stroke of twelve, reeking of perfume like a flower-basket, bundled up in lace, and dressed from top to toe in spring-green satin as the emblem of his amatory expectations, he rushed to Saint-Germain-des-Prés and planted himself beside one of the nave's pillars, hard by Lady Deborah.

With a profusion of coy mannerisms, he shortly contrived to attract one of her glances. The first triumph went to his head and made him still more fawning. When her Book of Hours fell from her grasp, he knelt with precipitate eagerness to recover it, and would not surrender it back until he had pressed his lips to it repeatedly. Again and again he inclined toward her, breathing softly:

"How adorable you are! I adore you! An Angel you are! Divine!…"

Now and then, with fervour bordering on the indecorous, he would deliver in her direction — scarcely veiled at all — stanzas from the psalter or fragments of devotion that could be construed as having application to herself. "*Rosa mystica*, mystical rose!" he murmured to her. "*Turris eburnea*, ivory tower! *Domus aurea*, golden dwelling! *Vas insigne devotionis*, resplendent vessel of devotion! *Janua cœli*, heaven's gate! *Stella matutina*, star of morning, evening star, Venus's star! *Fœderis arca*, ark of covenant!... *Columba mea*, my dove!... *Sic lilium inter spinas, sic amica mea inter filias* — as the lily amid thorns, thus my beloved among her sisters!..."

Lest she make herself conspicuous, Deborah ventured neither to protest nor to move away, suffering with gospel-like forbearance the marquis's every shamelessness and contrivance. She made a show of disregarding the whole performance, standing as unfeeling and gelid toward it as a sculptured figure toward an infant's playful prodding.

As the congregation dispersed, M. de Villepastour gave chase and intercepted her beneath the portico:

"I beg a thousand pardons, Mademoiselle, but might not this lovely glove I have just come upon in your seat belong to your graceful hand?"

"Forgive me, Monsieur — you took it from me whilst the Host was being elevated."

"Found or taken, it is all one!... Pray believe merely that relinquishing this precious token would pain me deeply, were not the sacrifice made bearable by the heavenly music of your voice."

"I pray you, Monsieur, go about your affairs and permit me to go mine."

"Let you go! Ah me, can the steel remove itself from the magnet's attraction?"

"Show me mercy, Monsieur — do not heap disgrace upon me. Was it not sufficient, your irreverence within the very house of God!"

"My irreverence?... But I was offering you adoration. I believed myself transported to the temple at Amathus![6]… Must I kneel before you to plead my case — do not turn me away. The moment I first saw you, Miss, your beauty smote me, enraptured me, set my heart ablaze with the most passionate devotion. Long did I labour to stifle it — I had not the presumption to aspire to one such as you, treasure-house of every excellence. What unavailing effort! All I accomplished was to thrust the arrow deeper that I desired to wrench free. It is plain to me at last: there is no healing love save through love returned. Show not such hardness of heart,

turn not a deaf ear to such intensity of feeling! Grant me but a smile not born of scorn, a glance not tinged with contempt, one word not spoken in anger, and you will bestow a measure of serenity and delight upon the soul of one in despair, making of the unluckiest lover the luckiest man alive."

"Monsieur, for pity's sake, I tell you again — leave me! Here I am in the very street where I live — is it your design to ruin my reputation before all the world, before the eyes of him I married? None but a perilous and depraved creature would make a plaything of a woman's good name in this fashion!..."

"Your good name is as sacred to me as my own, Mademoiselle — may God keep me from ever besmirching it, or I should know everlasting regret! I take my leave, trusting this mark of respect will receive its due appreciation, and will move your heart to show more compassion for one who lays before you discretion, love, and dutiful service."

The marquis, however, did not take himself off altogether — he kept her in sight from afar to satisfy himself as to the accuracy of Fitz-Harris's intelligence. Having beheld her step through the doors of the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, he carried on along his route with an air of thorough contentment, indeed almost of gaiety.

[1] In Roman mythology, Egeria is a water nymph and goddess who served as the divine consort, advisor, and legal counselor to Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome. She is famously known as the architect who imparted wisdom, religious rituals, and laws to the ancient Roman king

[2] In Greek mythology, Pylades is the Prince of Phocis, best known as the fiercely loyal cousin and devoted companion of Orestes. His name translates to "the one who is well-treated", but he is universally remembered as the ultimate symbol of unwavering friendship and brotherhood.

[3] The French Regency (*la Régence*) refers to the 1715–1723 period when Philippe II, Duke of Orléans, governed France as regent for the minor King Louis XV. This era bridged the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV, marked by a cultural shift toward Enlightenment, the rise of Rococo aesthetics, and financial experiments.

[4] Charles-Marguerite-Jean-Baptiste Mercier Dupaty (1746–1788) was a French jurist and man of letters whose reputation rested as much on his moral courage as his literary output. A magistrate at the Bordeaux parlement, he gained public renown in 1786 by securing the acquittal of three men wrongfully condemned to the wheel on fabricated charges — a campaign backed by Condorcet himself. His *Lettres sur l'Italie en 1785*, published in the year of his death, blended aesthetic sensibility with the philosophical spirit of the age and proved popular enough in France to earn the singular distinction of being placed on the Index by Rome.

[5] Charles-Albert Demoustier's *Letters to Émilie on Mythology* is a celebrated collection published between 1790 and 1798. Blending prose and verse, the work takes the form of epistolary lessons in which a narrator instructs his young pupil in mythology. This classic enjoyed immense literary success under both the Ancien Régime and the Revolution.

[6] Amathus or Amathous (Ancient Greek: Ἀμαθοῦς) was one of the ancient royal cities of Cyprus until about 300 BC. Some of its remains can be seen today on the southern coast in front of Agios Tychonas, about 6 miles (9.7 km) east of Limassol and 24 miles (39 km) west of Larnaca. Its ancient cult sanctuary of Aphrodite was the second most important in Cyprus, her homeland, after Paphos.

XVI.

During this selfsame time, there came to Fitz-Harris from his brother in Killarney a letter recounting how their erstwhile friend Patrick Fitz-Whyte — long since disappeared from those parts — had but recently stood trial *in absentia* before the assizes, been sentenced to hang, and suffered the ignominy of being executed in effigy on the quayside at Tralee, all for seducing, murdering, and robbing Lord Cockermouth's daughter. It pains me to relate that this appalling announcement, rather than afflicting Fitz-Harris in any degree, roused in that envious bosom of his nothing more than a furtive pleasure. With alacrity did he assent to the calumnious verdict delivered by the judges at Tralee; indeed, he derived such satisfaction from believing Patrick guilty that he embraced without hesitation this scarcely credible sentence.

Straightway he imparted the contents of the letter to his closest comrades, declaring to each that he was the sole

recipient of so delicate a trust, and that he should thus preserve its secrecy. Yet each of them, after his fashion, possessed his own trusted friend, and these friends others still, with the result that in a very short time the secret had become common talk in the regiment, and came at last to Patrick's knowledge, by which he was most deeply afflicted.

At dinner in the under-officers' mess, in full view of all his fellows, he was powerless to restrain himself from delivering pointed reproofs to Fitz-Harris.

"Pray tell me what I have done," said he, "to have provoked either your hatred or your complete disregard for my person? I am of your own nation, I am your friend, yet you have treated me abominably! The letter that came to you from Ireland should not have been shown first to these gentlemen, but to myself. A modicum of discretion was surely called for, and you ought not to have trusted so precipitately in the tittle-tattle of a correspondence. Whether the thing be forged or false, you cannot tell. I stand obliged, gentlemen, to confess to you that the story is indeed true. But here is what you could not have failed to know, you who called yourself my friend, you who were privy to my private affairs.... To absolve myself, gentlemen, of the shameful conviction that lies heavy upon my name, I should require to impart certain facts which honour denies me leave to utter, and will eternally deny. To convey to you the utter barbarity

of this judgment, I need only say that she whom I am charged with having murdered and despoiled — Miss Deborah, Countess of Cockermouth Castle — is my cherished wife and the lady of my heart. A good number of you, gentlemen, have beheld her walking at my side. For the murderer, I grant, there can be no mercy; nothing, I am aware, stirs our anger and our wrath more keenly than discovering we have been deceived in our good opinion; when we find ourselves disillusioned about one whom we held in honour and regarded as a man of virtue, I know how violent is the rage that possesses us; I know our duty demands we tear away his mask and heap obloquy upon him: but Fitz-Harris, you cannot — you simply cannot — have doubted me for so much as a heartbeat; you could never have supposed, can never suppose me guilty of such crimes — no, the thing is utterly impossible! You, to whom my whole being stood revealed as a book lies open — make what endeavours you will to delude yourself, to choke down the voice that rises from within your conscience itself, testifying that I am guiltless and upright! Your friendship, Fitz-Harris — I had thought it real!"

"Gentlemen, how does this whining strike you?" Fitz-Harris demanded with a sneer.

"Gentlemen, what think you of this perfidy?... Harris, I stand here and accuse you of the blackest treachery!"

"You have a sword, Patrick, do you not?"

"Gentlemen, here speaks his guilty conscience: one calls out one's equal to the field of honour, not some infamous villain worthy of the scaffold crying out for him — not a common murderer! Cold steel shall not be my means of retribution, Fitz-Harris!"

"Fight you shall!"

"No — I will not fight."

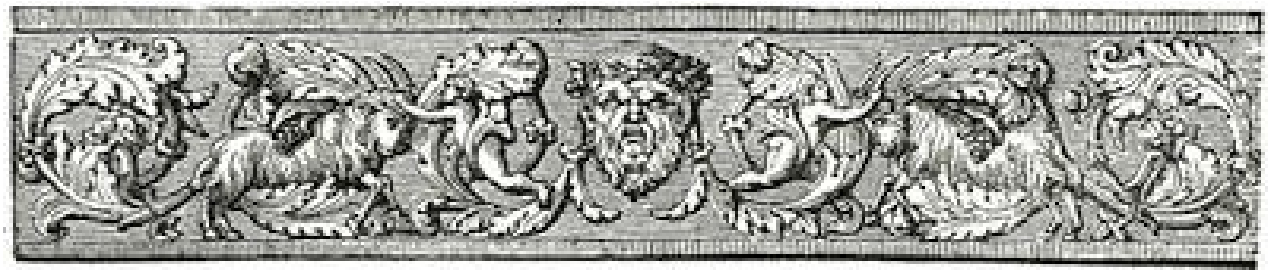
"Then I am to have my throat slit round some shadowy corner."

"Steel is not the weapon of my vengeance. The regard and affection I hold for a man, Fitz-Harris, do not crumble away in the space of an hour: my friendship rests upon respect, my respect upon qualities of worth, and such qualities — you know it as well as I — are not things that pass or change with every breeze. When a friend injures me through some passing lapse of judgment, he remains nonetheless — beyond this single fault that touches me alone — now as he was before, in my estimation and in that of the world, a man of honour, possessed of worthy feelings and deserving of respect. Both love and friendship know a tide of pains and pleasures, of hurts and kindnesses: I should have nothing but the utmost scorn for myself were my affection or

my comradeship to rise and fall with these tides, were they not — having once been pledged — proof against all change."

Fitz-Harris, taken aback, had no response to make to these parting observations; only some unseemly murmurs passed among those seated at the table.

It was not long before word went round the barracks — Fitz-Harris sparing no pains to make it believed — that Patrick had turned down the challenge, that Patrick was a dastard who by no persuasion could be got to meet his man. Making a poltroon of him did not suffice — they would have him a blockhead into the bargain: the dining-room incident was perverted and held up to scorn, becoming a byword for mockery.



XVII.

In matters of appetite satisfied, the Marquis de Gave de Villepastour proved himself the veriest weathercock; but where desire itself was concerned, no man could show greater constancy. The Mass at Saint-Germain-des-Prés was scarcely a week past when, bent upon another bold intrusion and disdaining to justify himself further, he ordered Fitz-Whyte confined to his quarters, muffled himself in a mantle that served as perfect disguise, and came to the Hôtel Saint-Papoul to sound the knocker at Lady Deborah's apartments.

It was Patrick she awaited, and she flung wide the door in her eagerness.

"I am come for M. Mac-Whyte," said he, affecting an accent not his own.

"He is abroad, sir, but will not be long in returning."

"Why then, if you will be so good, I shall remain until he comes — the matter I have with him admits of no delay."

"Pray enter, sir."

The moment the door had closed them in together, M. de Villepastour, assuming an air of gallantry, declared in ringing tones: "My beauteous miss, you have admitted the wolf into the sheepfold — what good are crook or shepherd's dress to you henceforth!" He suited action to word, tossing hat and cloak aside, and stood before her as she had seen him once before, arrayed in his dazzling costume of tender green.

Beholding him thus, Deborah gave a frightened cry and rushed into the depths of her chamber; he was upon her heels in an instant, and sank to his knees before her.

"I kiss this little slipper of yours, I worship the fair foot dwelling therein — that foot for which I would gladly trade every crown and royal staff in Christendom! Mademoiselle, I entreat you, do not flee! You have nothing to fear; you are attended by one of rank and one who will guard you faithfully. I should rather perish where I kneel than bring you one moment's distress. Be not angered by the trick I have employed to enter your presence; I am sensible — none more so — of its shameless want of delicacy. But when passion takes the reins, when reason is cast down and trodden upon,

is it possible to give ear to bloodless propriety? I was languishing unto death; to see you was necessity itself, to hear you speak, to become besotted with the emanations of your person — you are a living flower of loveliness, merciless miss, a tulip laden with honeyed drink. How fortunate the bees that taste of your chalice! Good God, where am I driven by this fever of mind? Alas and alas again! I am unhinged — a raving lunatic of love!"

M. de Villepastour was nothing of the sort — neither wild nor lunatic; he was but acting a role, and that with no small degree of address. Towards Deborah he nursed not one particle of genuine emotion; a frigid soul dwelt within him, though his mind blazed hotly. The blood coursed swift through him, fleshly craving spurred him ever onward, the fever of lust animated his every nerve. Already in his mind's eye he stroked a body of wonderful beauty, which his wolfish eye guessed at beneath her dress. Upon this alone his mind dwelt: to clasp that shapely body tight, to shower upon those naked graces ardent kisses.

Simple Deborah, taken in by his false show, felt her emotions touched briefly and found herself unable to reject with severity a personable young gentleman who seemed in her eyes more pitiable than blameworthy. Be a woman ever so artless, she is powerless to resist a certain inward triumph

when a suitor kneeling at her feet makes known to her the sovereignty of her charms.

"Pray get up, sir," she said to him then with a note of feeling in her voice; her confusion was such that no further words would come.

"She who raises up a suppliant pardons him. Oh! I am forgiven! Oh, how good you are — as good as you are lovely! Charms so abundant, perfections so numerous — these are incapable of sheltering an unfeeling nature. Oh, how I thank you! Suffer me to kiss your hands! By my immoderate flame I had deserved every measure of your anger; yet you have been gracious enough to comprehend — such goodness is yours — that your own bewitching attractions are to blame, and that it would be wrongful to make me suffer for a failing that originates entirely with you."

"Should I have bidden you stand, sir, the reason was simply that having you kneeling there discomfited me," Deborah replied coldly, cut to the quick by the Marquis's assumption of conquest already apparent in his manner and speech. "And should I now bid you take your leave, it is because your being here discomfits me equally. Go, sir, I entreat you!"

"Yes, yes, I comprehend, I must be unwelcome to you; you know nothing of me as yet. Truly, what could be duller

than tête-à-tête with someone for whom one cares nothing? Yet such is the sorcery of affection that this indifferent unknown I represent to you may, by one glance of yours, one utterance, undergo the sublimest transfiguration! Make me your bondsman, your confidant, your adoring servant, enchained to you by blossoms twisted into links. Go on, favour me with that awakening look, give voice to that talismanic word, and my lot shall be transformed!"

"Your prodigious gift of gab is thrown away on me, sir; I counsel you to be more sparing with it — a fine gentleman of your stamp must constantly stand in want of it. Take my word for it, sir — nothing shall I ever be to you, for reasons innumerable, and chiefly because, as you ought well to know, I am fettered not by chains of blossoms but by ties that admit of no dissolution."

"Attachments from which there is no release, my dear miss, are but leaden chains; and chains, to be borne with any grace, must needs be draped with roseate festoons."

"Goodness, one hears Marmontel[1] speaking! I suppose you are at work upon some operatic poem, sir?"

"With yourself cast as the intractable *prima donna*, my fair one."

"You being the amorous champion, I presume — boring no less than he is tender. But sir, I entreat you — this

harassment must cease! Take your leave! My husband is looked for — you know this full well; each instant I fear his coming. Leave at once, I beg — let him not encounter you here! Save yourself from public disgrace, save me from a dreadful spectacle — he is given to such violence, such jealousy, that he would take your life!"

"Well, well! You would have him be some man-eating giant. I am rather intrigued to learn by what method he will make a meal of me. I think I shall not budge."

"Be gone, I entreat you by all that is sacred; I kneel before you, sir! Gracious God! The bell! It must be he! You are ruined! I said as much, did I not!"

"Why, then, let him come in — he is welcome enough."

"Mercy! What shall I do?"

"Let him in."

"No, sir. I will be kinder than you have any right to expect — you shall have my pity. Here, you see — a hidden stair lies beyond this door. Go that way — leave, run!"

"Go? Take flight? No, my thanks. Keep your private exit for those who want it — I am altogether satisfied here and mean to stay put. Well then, answer to your man-eater."

"You will have it so? So be it! But reproach no one save yourself for what is to come."

"Well, go and greet your man-eater."

"Say no more, sir!"

Shortly thereafter Deborah reappeared alone, looking troubled, bearing an opened letter which she held out before her.

"What now? It seems it was not your lord and master after all, my charming lady?"

"Not yet, no."

"But the note is his — I know the hand well enough. It tells you, I presume, that some obstacle detains him. He shall not come, in point of fact. Ten to one the libertine has found himself confined to barracks."

"Then you know about it? Are you yourself one of the musketeers?"

"Do I seem so to you?"

"Not in the least — but the brazenness, certainly. Dear God, dear God! Can it be he is hindered from coming when I should need him so urgently! Yet, all ye Saints! Who is to free me from you?"

"No one whatsoever."

"I have shied away from scandal till now, but you press me past all bearing. Be gone, or I scream for rescue through that window."

"You shall do no such thing."

So saying, the Marquis forced her from the window, made fast the door-locks by double turning them, and pocketed the keys.

"In any case, you are secured here in my company; none can come in save by battering down these doors. Make your peace with it."

Deborah, driven to distraction, sank onto a couch on the verge of unconsciousness.

"But what a child you are to torment yourself thus for so little cause; it is madness itself to wish for a scene at this late hour — nine o'clock is almost upon us — that would blast your reputation beyond recovery. We are private here, the world shut out, only we two existing! Not one person anywhere knows or shall ever learn that I am here with you; no love affair was ever pursued in deeper secrecy, none ever more thoroughly concealed, none ever bearing such promise of delight! Real pleasure dwells only in what is hidden and what takes one by surprise. Come now, my huntress, let yourself go — allow that exquisite body its moment of bliss! Pleasure is rare and faithless; frequently one labours long and hard to sample it in the end. You have it at your feet, burning itself away — gather it up! You resist your own self quite madly! I can see perfectly well that you are equally aroused:

your forehead is blanched, appetite gleams in your eyes, your bosom beats softly in its prison, your hands sear my lips as burning coals do, you tremble at my touch! Ah! I am undone! Give me embrace for embrace! Let us commingle our souls, our lives, the flower of our years! One kiss, one only, and I shall be exalted to godhood! How pitiless you prove yourself, Madam!"

"How truly dangerous a man!"

"How grievously you cause me to suffer! Embraces, lamentations, warnings of violence, black despair — can none of these things affect you in the least?"

"Nothing in the world. God stands with me — I will not give way."

"One would think you built of brick!"

"Against which you destroy yourself in vain, sir."

"I see, to my disappointment, that your education must be undertaken afresh, Madam. Your life has been passed far from Court; you are stuffed full of petty-bourgeois scruples and country-bred habits. At Versailles you would earn yourself a magnificent reputation — for being laughable."

"That is the one triumph a woman of honour could desire in such a place."

"Nevertheless, your uncivilised temper aside, your charms would grant you wholly different prerogatives there. That is the sole place where you might reveal yourself in all your brilliance."

"You have my congratulations, sir — this lute of seduction you play shows no want of variety. The string of passion having failed you utterly, you now essay that of self-regard."

"The man you call lover — or husband, as you prefer — is no more than a pedestrian musketeer. I am of another order entirely: my word counts for something, my power extends far. If you hold any interest in this wretched youth, if your fortune is linked with his, could you possibly remain indifferent to his prosperity, to witnessing his ascent to the heights of royal favour and riches?"

"Splendid! And now we hear the string of ambitious desire being struck."

"Did you by any chance conceive notions of wifely faithfulness when you quit your island? Dear me! How behind the times you are in Ireland! But surely it were tantamount to murder that so much perfection, such beauty — so perfectly made to be celebrated — should slip through this world unknown. The female is the loveliest instrument devised by creation; yet left unattended, she is the most cheerless and

inconsequential item of furniture imaginable. To set in motion the verse and music she keeps hidden, there must be — just as with the spinet — a practised hand coursing over her ivories; there must be a passionate mouth giving her breath and vitality, as one does an hautboy."

"There is no wearying you."

"Why, that is simply one more claim to excellence, my lady."

"You are shameless!"

"No one ever becomes a lord in love's domain who is not thoroughly impudent."

"If that is the measure, you must be sovereign indeed."

"Sovereign and scoundrel, my lady."

Bit by bit the Marquis had eased himself gently upon the sopha next to Deborah, and was making attempts to grip her waist and clutch at her hands.

"Keep away from me, sir, come no closer. I say to you plainly, your every effort is wasted. Will you begin your attacks again? You are quite insane!"

"Ah! If you possessed but a touch of madness, how much more reasonable we should both become! I would not exhaust myself attempting to move a heart of stone or scattering my grain upon rocky ground; and you, mistress,

would not fritter away in speeches and silly airs the time that could be so enchantingly spent advancing our common felicity. The caresses we might already have lavished upon one another! The kisses we ought already to have tasted, the transports we should have enjoyed! By the by, do you care for prints, fair miss? I have here about me a little book filled with capital engravings — the drawings are said to be Clodion's[2] work. Bring that candle over — there now, see for yourself."

The Marquis de Villepastour had produced from his pocket a little volume in sumptuous binding, which he now held open before Deborah. It proved to be one of those revolting works of obscenity, embellished with illustrations to aid understanding and adorn the text — such things as were fabricated and greedily consumed in such abundance during that depraved era. She cast upon it an unsuspecting look, which she turned away at once, giving a shriek of revulsion and pushing the foul thing violently aside. The Marquis scurried to collect it gingerly, laughing until he wept at his own exquisite piece of humour.

"So this is the value, lovely creature, you place upon the Hours of Cythera[3]?"

"You inspire in me nothing but disgust and contempt, sir!"

"These prints are genuinely excellent. At Court they have proven most popular — the Queen's Ladies have delighted in them exceedingly, and this particular volume was given me by a Lady of Honour. Monsieur le Maréchal Prince de Soubise — a commander pre-eminently in this branch of affairs — purchased, himself alone, a subscription of two hundred volumes. Might the lady be willing to receive it as a token of my regard?"

"You disgust me beyond measure! Come no closer, or I shall shriek 'Fire!' Away with you, leave me — you have lost your way entirely. Such as you have no concern here. I tell you again: nothing shall I ever be to you!"

"I must correct you — you shall be my victim. It is past ten of the clock. Most willingly would I share your couch, save that, in proximity to so righteous a Judith as you prove yourself, I stand in danger of furnishing a comic Holofernes. I bid you good night![4]"

After wrapping his mantle round himself anew, the Marquis delivered a series of sardonic obeisances and made his exit, seething with fury and mortification which he had made efforts to mask.

[1] Jean-François Marmontel (1723–1799) was one of those fortunate men whom talent and charm carried from humble origins in the Limousin all the way to the heart of Parisian literary life. Voltaire's encouragement sent him to the capital, where he found his way into the salons of the Encyclopédistes and the patronage of Madame de Pompadour. His *Contes moraux* painted an affectionate and sharp-eyed portrait of French society under Louis XV, while his *Bélisaire* caused a minor scandal with its plea for religious toleration. Ruined by the Revolution, he retreated to a Norman cottage and wrote his *Mémoires d'un père* — a book remarkable enough that John Stuart Mill later credited it with lifting him out of depression.

[2] Claude Michel (1738–1814), known as Clodion, was the master of the small and the sensuous. Born in Nancy into a family steeped in sculpture — his uncles were among the leading practitioners of the day — he trained in Paris and Rome before returning to delight an aristocratic clientele with his irresistible terracottas: nymphs, satyrs, and bacchantes caught in moments of playful abandon, rendered with a

warmth and vitality that marble could scarcely have matched. Even Catherine the Great tried to lure him to St Petersburg, without success. The Revolution drove him back to Nancy and relative obscurity, though he re-emerged in Paris in his later years. He died in 1814 on the very eve of the allied invasion of the city — as if unwilling to witness the world that had replaced the one he had so gracefully adorned.

[3] *Cythera* (also known as Kythira) is a Greek island located at the southwestern entrance of the Aegean Sea, opposite the southeastern tip of the Peloponnese peninsula. Traditionally counted as one of the seven main Ionian Islands, it is renowned in mythology as the birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, often referred to as "Cytherea" in her honour.

[4] The allusion is to the biblical story of Judith and Holofernes, as related in the Book of Judith and immortalised in paint by Caravaggio, Artemisia Gentileschi, and others. Holofernes was an Assyrian general besieging the Israelite city of Bethulia, whose doom came not on the battlefield but in his own tent: the widow Judith, feigning submission, gained his confidence, waited until wine had done its work, and severed his head with his own sword.

XVIII.

Deborah was still distraught when Patrick came to see her the next day, her composure yet unsettled by all the indignities and terrors to which she had been subjected the night before.

"My dear, what is it? Tell me what has happened, my love," said he, as he kissed her upon the forehead. "I see distress written in your face."

"Oh Pat, dear Pat — how wretchedly I felt your absence yesterday!"

"Your devoted care touches me deeply, though I fear I must take you to task for it — you had no cause to distress yourself thus. The affair was of no consequence whatever: for a single word, a mere peccadillo, M. de Gave de Villepastour ordered me confined to barracks and kept me under arrest four-and-twenty hours, just as I apprised you in my note. That, I give you my word, is the sum of it!"

Yet Deborah had no thought of answering his forthrightness in kind, and forbore to mention the attempted violation of which she had been the victim. Such a revelation would have afflicted Patrick's tender feelings too grievously; his naturally suspicious turn of mind would have conjured up excessive alarm and rage, and he would have worn himself to death with anxious torment. Besides, what good could come of destroying his inward calm? An amante may be forgiven, perhaps, for introducing jealous doubts into a heart wherein love languishes and stands in need of rousing; but wantonly to instil it in a heart already wrought to fever-pitch by ardent passion would be an act of savage cruelty, a fault into which capricious women fall all too easily, but one wholly alien to Deborah. Besides, even had she believed herself bound by duty, rather than by policy, to make the disclosure, she would have held her peace nonetheless at such a time, unwilling to crush him beneath yet another weight, since he appeared himself to be labouring under some anxiety.

"A shadow lies upon your thoughts, Patrick. What has wounded you, or who? When your heart is vexed, you know full well, the evidence is written clear in your eyes."

"I cannot deny it, I am still thoroughly distressed by something that has caused me great sadness: Fitz-Harris was taken up yesterday under sealed warrant and conducted to the Bastille."

"For what crime?"

"You do Fitz-Harris an injustice — he could never commit a crime. What he stands accused of is more imagined than real, though likely enough in its way. You understand how incautious he is, how given to chatter and backbiting; you know his devotion to peddling witty verses and disgraceful gossip. A witty phrase would tempt him, I am convinced, even one that might send him to the block. The other day, according to what is alleged against him, he recited before assembled company a scurrilous quatrain touching Madame Putiphar; the thing had no doubt been making the rounds of Court and city for a considerable while. By ill fortune, one of M. de Sartines'[1] spies was in attendance that evening, and sold him out."

"I fail to see what should afflict you in this affair. What Fitz-Harris's tales always wanted was a proper moral, and he has hit upon it finally — the Bastille. The experience may instruct him in the virtue of reticence — a wholesome instruction, I should say."

"Nay, a terrifying lesson: once inside those walls, none can tell if he shall ever come out again."

"Good God, how dreadful that would be!"

"I was wounded to the quick at breakfast today by the flippant air with which our messmates — his self-styled

friends included — made sport of his calamity. They descended to such depths of cowardice as to upbraid him for having persecuted the spotless Madame Putiphar with his derision, pitying her with affecting solicitude; indeed, they went so far as to speak in her justification — the very fellows who had been wont to bespatter her daily with the sewage of their abuse. My lady, how beneath contempt are men! I do not deny that the venomous temper of Fitz-Harris has doubtless touched nearly all of them in some painful place — but does one ever have the right to be merciless? These fine fellows, who consider it a point of honour to seek redress by the sword, show themselves admirably proficient, too, at seeking it by calumny. Men who regard it as a point of honour to seek the blood of anyone, even of a friend, who might by mischance give them umbrage, have evidently not embraced as a comparable point of honour the obligation neither to oppress a man behind his back nor to strike at one already brought low. None gave utterance to the slightest remorse; not a man among them conceived one honourable thought for his sake. Cursed is the man whose friends are held to him only by fear — fear of his sword-arm or his savage wit! Let him stumble, and there will be cheering. Hardly have the foresters struck down an oak beneath which nervous cattle were wont to gather whenever the weather threatened, than the herd comes hurrying to crop and ruin those selfsame limbs that had given them shelter times without number.

Their malignity, their unseemly gaiety, their utter forsaking of him — all of this has struck me to the heart with such force that I am now firmly resolved to save Fitz-Harris."

"How like you this is, Patrick — noble and great-hearted as always. Yet I cannot persuade myself that this worthy undertaking will be attended by success."

"You know as well as anyone what can be wrought by strength of purpose and dogged resolve — you told me so yourself, and very prettily too, in a billet you wrote me once. Though I may not win him his complete liberty, I may perhaps manage to curtail the duration of his imprisonment; and even should the attempt prove wholly fruitless, I shall have the inner peace that comes of having tried — I shall have nothing with which to reproach myself."

"How good you are, Patrick!"

"Tomorrow I shall lose no time in going to Choisy, there to kneel at Madame Putiphar's feet. My efforts shall be so unremitting, my petitions so heartfelt, that her punitive temper will be obliged to relent, and she will show mercy, though it be perhaps the first act of clemency she has ever shown."

"How good you are, Patrick! I honour you for it — but pray do it purely for the sake of your own conscience, as you yourself remarked. Do not imagine your benevolence will

meet with any return. Generosity is not a coin one can exchange — think of it rather as an unstamped gold coin; he who accepts it sends it at once to the smelter. It is a key of gold opening our heart to our fellows, and closing theirs to us without pity. Whenever I hear someone running down another or speaking ill of them, I find myself wishing to ask: 'Doubtless you are beholden to them?' Do not think I seek to uproot in you a noble impulse, the very one that most closely resembles the Creator in His creature. Generosity, you see, is a spark of Providence. By all means go! Save Fitz-Harris! Only be certain of this: no person alive would undertake for your sake what you are about to undertake for his — least of all, I assure you, Fitz-Harris himself."

"Merciful powers! You know, then?..."

"I know nothing whatever. Yet Fitz-Harris belongs to the vilest breed of men: a tattler, a man who puts his candle under the bushel, and who speaks Raca unto his brethren[2]."

"How came you to learn of it?"

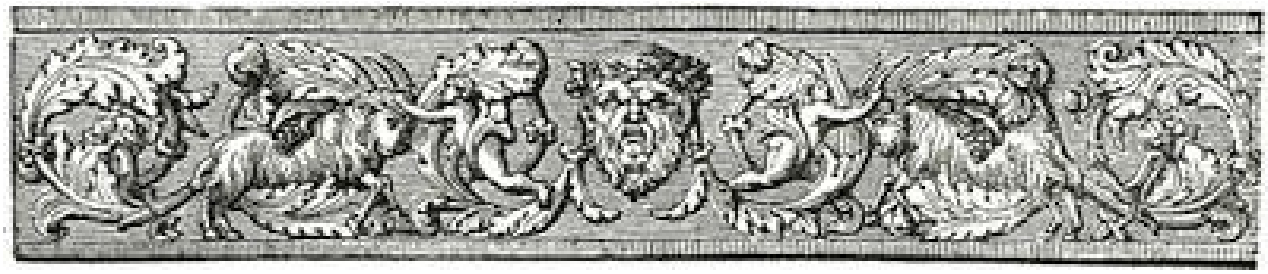
"I know nothing, I say — nothing save what my heart whispers."

"Your insight, then, partakes of the mystical arts; you are guided by sacred forebodings; the Almighty has blessed you with visionary powers."

"Nothing of the kind. God has but lodged my soul in a fragile and keenly feeling frame. Whatever strikes against it causes it to quiver and resound at length, and it is to these tremors that my soul hearkens."

[1] Antoine de Sartine (1729–1801) was perhaps the most formidable policeman Paris ever had. Born in Barcelona to a French father in Spanish service, he rose to become Lieutenant General of Police for fifteen years under Louis XV — effectively the city's true master, overseeing everything from grain supply and street lighting to the darkest corners of its underworld. His spies were everywhere, his secret correspondence was the envy of every European monarch, and he reportedly boasted to the king that whenever three people spoke in the street, one of them was his. He was also, paradoxically, a protector of the Encyclopédistes and a friend to Diderot. Promoted to Secretary of the Navy under Louis XVI, he quadrupled the shipbuilding budget and helped forge the fleet that would tip the American War of Independence — only to be dismissed for overspending. The Revolution, whose coming his own methods had arguably helped provoke, cost him his son and daughter-in-law to the guillotine. He died quietly in Tarragona in 1801, never having returned to the city he had once known better than anyone alive.

[2] Both allusions are biblical. "Putting one's candle under a bushel" derives from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:15), where Christ admonishes his followers not to hide their light beneath a basket — meaning that gifts, virtues, or truths ought not to be concealed from the world. Applied to a person, it suggests one who deliberately obscures his own talents or keeps his abilities from public view. "Raca" comes from Matthew 5:22, where Christ warns that whoever calls his brother *Raca* — an Aramaic term of contempt, roughly equivalent to "worthless wretch" or "empty-headed fool" — shall be answerable before the council. The portrait the sentence draws is thus a quietly damning one: a man who wastes his gifts in obscurity while visiting scorn upon those around him — failing, in a single breath, both the duty of usefulness and the duty of charity.



XIX.

And indeed, when morning broke, Patrick — more determined than ever in his brave design of extricating Fitz-Harris from his vile prison-hole — repaired betimes to the château of Choisy-le-Roi, which had fallen, as had many another piece of royal property, from the grasp of the late Mademoiselle de Mailly[1], Marquise de Tournelle, Duchesse de Château-Roux, into the keeping of that Poisson woman, Lenormand's wife, her they called Dame Putiphar.

The royal mistress had not yet made her toilette when a servant came to inform her that a musketeer in the King's service was without, requesting admittance. Startled and not a little intrigued by so unseasonable a visit, she bade Madame du Hausset, her femme de chambre[2], go down directly and discover what sort of person this was, and upon what business he came.

"There is no message," said Patrick. "I bring nothing of that sort to Madame Putiphar. Indeed, I desire nothing whatever for myself — save this alone, that she be gracious enough to admit me to her sight and suffer me to address her briefly. I shall hold myself eternally in her debt for such a privilege, and count the moments spent in her presence the most precious I have ever known."

Back went Madame du Hausset forthwith, bearing this selfsame message to her lady's ears. "And I should add," said she, "that he expressed himself with a sweetness and a courtesy so exceptional that I found myself quite beguiled. Quite young he is — twenty at the outside. And beautiful, ma'am, with such singular beauty as I have never witnessed: it eclipses Monsieur de Cossé-Brissac, it puts Monsieur le Comte de Provence in the shade — nay, it surpasses even your own! A beauty utterly unworldly, before which one could prostrate oneself. An Angel, I tell you! A very musketeer out of Paradise Lost!"

"Such raptures, Madame du Hausset, mercy! This morning you are all gunpowder and flame!" remarked Madame Putiphar, putting on a show of supreme nonchalance.

"I speak but the plain truth — you will discover as much yourself. Am I to bring him up?"

"No, no, my good creature — tell him I am out of sorts and can admit no callers."

Such languid unconcern was purely for show, a veil over her restless eagerness — she was aflame with curiosity to lay eyes upon him.

"What! Can you truly mean to be so unkind, ma'am?"

"It will prove to be nothing but some lovesick young idiot — Heaven knows they rain down often enough! — some affected puppy intent upon making me a romantic address worthy of Don Quixote himself."

"Nothing of the sort, ma'am! One could see good judgment in his look, and trouble besides."

"Enough. Let him be shown in!"

Patrick's appearance prompted an immediate reaction from Madame Putiphar, who lay becomingly disposed across her couch: she stirred admiringly, and for a time did nothing but regard him with a soft, dreaming look.

"Madame, on bended knee I ask your indulgence," said Patrick, visibly moved and venturing a few shy steps nearer, "that I should come to break in upon your peaceful rest, and startle the sweet fancies of your morning hour with these unhappy entreaties of mine."

"Your call, dear sir, I welcome as a fortunate omen for the day now breaking."

"I am touched to discover, Madame, that my faith in your benevolence — which emboldened me to seek this interview — was not misplaced. Be certain, I beg, that no prideful motive, no empty self-regard, has led me to make this approach."

"Do come forward, sir, if you please — fetch a chair and place yourself at my side."

The rich red velvet of the spacious fauteuil formed a striking contrast to Patrick's pale and flaxen comeliness, which caught such lustrous gleams that gave to his skin that peculiar translucency one sees when a hand is raised against candlelight. At his elbow, a small cabinet of Boulle's[3] workmanship bore a jumbled array of drawing implements — crayons, chalks, sketches, a few engraved plates, some gravers — and the Tancrède[4] of Monsieur the Royal Attendant, spread wide at its fawning dedication.

Just then, Madame Putiphar happened to be working upon the engraving of a miniature work of François Boucher's[5]. Already she had executed and brought forth a set of sixty engravings reproducing the intaglios cut by Guay[6] in fine stones, all pieces from her own cabinet of curiosities. The volume, a handsome folio, is at present very difficult to

procure, as it was struck off in but a modest edition for private distribution among her acquaintance.

The fine arts, and painting in particular, had always claimed much of her attention. Indeed, it was on this account that Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire, happening one day upon her as she drew a portrait, had favoured her with this excessively mannered little verse:

Putiphar, with godlike pen of thine,
Thine own features shouldst thou trace;
Never could a hand more fine
Produce a work of greater grace.

Patrick looked decidedly embarrassed; wishing to put him at his ease and deliver him from the burden of opening the interview, she said with pleasant cordiality: "You are not French, I presume?"

"Madame, I am of Ireland. Patrick Fitz-Whyte, at your service."

"So I had supposed, hearing you speak. I daresay you come back from the Indian campaigns with Baron Arthur Lally de Tollendal[7]?"

"Not so, Madame; I have been away from my own country only this twelvemonth."

"What reason have you, then, for not being with the Irish regiment of Comte Arthur Dillon[8]?"

"I had no wish to go far from Paris, and therefore sought admission to the Musketeers instead; the thing was readily accomplished, thanks to the noble favour of my lords François Fitz-James and Arthur-Richard Dillon."

"If you are a man of ambition, if you look to achieve great military rank, you would be well advised to take French citizenship, as the late Duke James of Berwick[9] did."

"No, Madame — I could never do so! Two mothers one might have, as one might have two fatherlands; but to cast off the entrails that nurtured us in being, the earth that delivered us into life — that can only be done by one who has lost all natural sentiment. My memories, my tears, my heart's love — these are Ireland's; to France I pledge my devotion, my faithfulness, my gratitude. But I shrink from what I must call prostitution — and such was the choice of the late Marshal Duke Fitz-James of Berwick: an Irishman become French, a Spanish Grandee to boot."

"I praise you for sentiments so elevated, though I daresay they will be considered by many as excessively strict."

"I do not deceive myself, Madame — I know that such a view will be styled mere prejudice. If prejudice be the name for every natural movement of the soul, every unforced attachment of the heart, then I admit to being richly supplied with them. Say what they will, our sophists with all their grandiose love of mankind, an Irishman will forever count for more with me than an Italian; a single broom-bush from Macgillycuddy's Reeks more than any chestnut in the Tuileries; and the lovely shores of Lough Leane[10], where my infant feet first wandered, shall forever mean more to me than all the beauty of the Lac Léman[11]. Such is the emotion, Madame, indefinable though it be, composed equally of friendship and of fellow-feeling, which has caused me to present myself before you."

"Say on without fear, my young friend — where you are concerned, I am pure benevolence."

"I had one fellow-countryman in the Musketeers, one brother-in-arms, one true friend; Madame, it is by your decree that he has been plunged into the vaults of the Bastille."

"Indeed? Who is he?"

"A man named Fitz-Harris — nephew of the Abbé Fitz-Harris of Saint-Spire de Corbeil."

"Fitz-Harris... Ah, yes — that abominable wretch! How dare you concern yourself with such a villain without

blushing for it?" Madame Putiphar burst out, her tone bitter with rage and malice.

"Indeed, Madame, you judge my heart aright — such a heart could never espouse villainy; which is why it now implores your pardon for Fitz-Harris."

"Pardon for such a one! A hack pamphleteer, a libel-monger, trailing his insolence wheresoever he goes and besmirching the very majesty of the Crown! A despicable traducer, whose baseness goes so far as to malign a defenceless woman merely because Pharaoh has had the goodness to cast upon her a benevolent eye! Certainly not! No clemency for such a wretch! Regicides are not the most formidable danger to a crown: that knife-blow of Damiens[12] gained Pharaoh as many loyal subjects as the pen-thrusts of Voltaire have cost him. The Bastille would have been sufficient for Damiens; it is this friend of yours, Monsieur, who ought to have been dismembered by horses."

"They have deceived your good judgment, Madame: I swear by the God I serve, and by whatsoever you deem holy, that Fitz-Harris is not a wrongdoer, not a contemptible and menacing hireling, not a purveyor of libels, not a loathsome scribbler of pamphlets. Your officers, no doubt seeking to play the zealot and glorify their arrest, have described him to you in the most shocking hues; but Fitz-Harris is a man of probity and a steadfast servant of His Majesty."

"Are you saying he did not heap public indignity upon me by spouting forth some villainous verses directed against my person?"

"Madame, your constables are undoubtedly Gascon or Flemish in origin? They betray a conspicuous penchant for bombast and exaggeration. That vast poem, that slanderous epic of theirs, is in fact no more than a four-line stanza, which I have heard described as more badly written than ill-intentioned. I do not contest the misdeed, as you see, nor do I strive to lessen its weight — indeed, to lessen it would be tantamount to erasing it entirely. It is quite true that Fitz-Harris — and I reproach him bitterly for it — was guilty of a misstep which, had you less charity, might be thought beyond forgiveness: namely, that of repeating in company an epigram purported to have sprung from the Court, and one that had been in general circulation for some while. Yet he spoke it merely as one would retail a bit of gossip — with no hostile aim, no secret purpose, unthinkingly, recklessly, precisely as he goes about everything he does. Vain of being foremost in knowledge of what the town says, he goes seeking urban rumours from whomsoever he meets, and presently reimburses whomsoever he meets with the same, precisely as they came to him. He is but — and I beg your indulgence for so whimsical a figure — a variety of speaking-tube, an auditory cone, decanting by reflex action whatsoever finds its

way into him. Justice would demand that we punish not him, who is but the device, but those who set him playing."

"Wonderfully argued — you have converted Sir Fitz-Harris into a mere parrot, an altogether delightful Vert-Vert[13]."

"It pleases me greatly to observe that you have been good enough to apprehend my argument, Madame, and I make bold to hope you will not cause Fitz-Harris to suffer, as Vert-Vert did, from the brutishness of boatmen."

"This accommodating nobility of yours, sir, unlocks for you my heart and my good opinion. Ask for yourself and all will be yours; but put that person from your mind. A repeater of this sort, in days as rife with detractors as ours, is a baneful presence who ought properly to be shut away from society."

"In Heaven's name, Madame, by the love you bear your brother!"

"It is useless — I will grant you nothing. Am I not beset on all sides by adversaries as it is, stirred up and combined to bring about my downfall! Beyond a few artists and a few poets who have sworn me their self-serving loyalty till death and after, I can number not one heart that throbs on my account. In the far-off I hear but the snarling of hate; near at hand I am attended by nothing save speechless dogs."

"Ah, Madame, you should not suffer melancholy to dispirit you so! Men may be ungracious and unjust, I grant you, but there abides with you still a whole sphere of loving hearts and steadfast allies."

"You truly believe it?... Ah me! You cannot know what good your words accomplish!" she whispered with a sigh, taking his hand between her own and pressing it most tenderly. "Is there a crueller lot imaginable! To have tumbled from every pinnacle — youth, love, and Power all lost.... Oh! Those words of yours have brought coolness to my aching breast! Had you the least conception of the suffering that attends being cursed by a whole nation? For I know it beyond question — France abhors me utterly: she lays at my door all her calamities, naming me the wellspring of her woes. Poor deluded France! You will discover, after I am no more, if greater happiness awaits you! I am made responsible for every disaster of the Seven Years' War[14]; I am accused on every side, oppressed from every quarter — why, even this Cardinal de Bernis[15] joins the chorus!... There is a viper I nourished at my own breast!... Let this be your lesson: give no serpent shelter in your breast, my comely young friend."

In that moment, Madame Putiphar, having by degrees pushed away her coverlet, found herself lying almost entirely uncovered upon the bed. Her chemise of fine cambric and lace, having fallen into dishabille, allowed the generous

contours of her hips and her beautiful waist, of which she was so justly vain, to display themselves most suggestively. Although she was by then one-and-forty years of age, her neck still displayed a queenly grace of line, and her bosom kept its whiteness and its vigour; only in her features could one perceive more marked deterioration — not the deterioration of the passing years, but the corrosive work of guilty recollection. Supported by her pillow, with her head inclined towards Patrick, she fixed him with a constant smile and dreamy gaze laden with such cupidity as would leave any observer uncertain whether her eyes were dampened by penitence or by carnality.

Believing the occasion ripe for a final assault, Patrick flung himself to his knees and began kissing that arm which the lady permitted to dangle with coquettish negligence over the bed's margin.

"By Heaven, Madame, by all those who hold you dear, I implore you — forgive Fitz-Harris, be not implacable."

"Heaven help me! Where would you drag me?... No! Say nothing to me of that person."

"How can this be, Madame! Oh no — impossible! You possess too kind a heart! Do you mean to say that for one ill-chosen phrase, for the veriest trifle, for a moment's folly, for a blunder, you would rob nature, rob love, rob life's very

promise of a boy — a witless unfortunate?... Surely not! Would you permit a good and beautiful youth, only now commencing his days, to waste away in a dungeon? No, no — I will not credit it! Such vengeance cannot have taken root in your heart, your soul cannot have admitted so terrible a resolve: clemency, clemency for Fitz-Harris!..."

"No: all things for your sake, not one for his."

"Oh! Such cruelty, Madame! You lacerate my very soul, you visit unspeakable pain upon me. Have pity, I implore you — spare his life!... Why yes, I grant it — he has wronged you, the creature is a craven, a cut-throat, I know not what! None but the headsman is fit for him! Yet show yourself great of soul — pardon the wretch. The most splendid attribute, the most precious stone in the diadem, is the right to grant pardon — and that right belongs to you! Extend your pardon — show yourself a queen in deed! God has entrusted you with a sceptre; God will try you in the scales reserved for royalty; God has elevated you to sovereignty!"

"Well then, Patrick, you shall have your way — the fellow may go free. I give you his pardon. His reprieve is yours to give him, but see that he knows — and knows clearly — I show this clemency to you alone, never to him."

"Madame, you have my eternal thanks — and thanks be to Heaven itself! My head spins with relief — how shall I ever convey what this means to me?"

"Gratitude? I will have none of it, Patrick. By unburdening myself to you in a manner I have done with no other creature on earth, I have made you something far better than a servant — I have made you my friend."

"I am quite unfit for so great a privilege, Madame."

"Let God be the judge of that. God be with you, Monsieur. Present yourself at Versailles when two days have passed — that is where I shall be — and there I will put into your possession the letter granting this creature its freedom."

With that, the lady rang for Madame du Hausset and had Patrick shown out.

His feelings were such as he could scarcely name — a confusion of sensations impossible to define. All that had passed crowded into his mind at once, jostling for his attention. There was a certain idea he struggled to thrust away, yet it kept forcing itself back through the dizzying whirl of his thoughts. Had it really happened? His judgment rebelled against believing it — yet he could have sworn that just as he was kissing Madame Putiphar's arms in that frenzy of thankfulness, burning lips had alighted upon his brow.

[1] Marie-Anne de Mailly-Nesle, Duchess of Châteauroux (1717–1744) was the most formidable of the three Mailly-Nesle sisters who successively captured the heart of Louis XV — a remarkable dynastic achievement in infidelity. Pushed into the role of royal mistress by the scheming Marshal de Richelieu, she proved far more than a mere favourite: ambitious and politically sharp, she used her influence to draw France into the War of the Austrian Succession and urged the king himself onto the battlefield in Flanders. Her downfall came when Louis fell gravely ill at Metz in 1744 and, fearing death, submitted to a very public act of contrition — dismissing her from court as the price of his absolution. The king recovered, promptly exiled the bishop who had humiliated him, and recalled her to Versailles. Fate, however, proved less forgiving than the clergy: she died of peritonitis a few weeks later, aged just twenty-seven. Whispers of poison circulated, as they always do when the inconvenient die young at court, but nothing was ever established.

[2] Historically, it referred to a personal female attendant who waited on a female employer.

[3] André-Charles Boulle (1642–1732) was the supreme virtuoso of French decorative furniture, a man whose genius for marquetry — intricate inlays of tortoiseshell, brass, pewter and ebony — earned him the title of *Premier ébéniste du Roi* and a workshop in the Louvre itself. Colbert commended him to Louis XIV as the most skilled craftsman in his profession, and the Sun King's court proved an inexhaustible patron. Yet for all his magnificence, Boulle was constitutionally incapable of managing money: a lifelong, ruinous obsession with collecting paintings and drawings — among them, reputedly, forty-eight Raphaels and wax models by Michelangelo — kept him perpetually in debt, perpetually borrowing, and perpetually behind on his commissions. A fire in 1720 destroyed much of his stock and deepened his losses still further. He died in the Louvre in 1732 leaving debts, four sons, and a body of work so widely imitated that distinguishing the master's hand from his imitators remains a puzzle for experts to this day.

[4] *Tancrède* is a tragedy in five acts by Voltaire that premiered on 3 September 1760.

[5] François Boucher (1703–1770) was the painter who most perfectly embodied the spirit of Rococo France — voluptuous, charming, and entirely unapologetic about it. Rising from modest origins in Paris, he became the favourite artist of Madame de Pompadour, whose taste and patronage

he both shaped and reflected, and eventually *Premier Peintre du Roi* under Louis XV. His canvases peopled the age with rosy goddesses, obliging shepherdesses, and mischievous cupids, rendered with a technical brilliance that his critics — Diderot chief among them — found morally deplorable and visually irresistible in equal measure. He famously dismissed nature itself as *trop verte et mal éclairée* — too green and badly lit — a remark that tells one almost everything about his art. The Goncourt brothers, those tireless chroniclers of the century, put it simply: Boucher did not merely paint his age, he *was* it.

[6] Jacques Guay (1711–1793) was the supreme gem engraver of eighteenth-century France, a miniaturist in the most literal sense — a man who carved the history of a reign into carnelian, jasper and sardonyx, each stone no larger than a thumbnail. Born in Marseille, he came to Paris, studied drawing under Boucher, travelled to Florence and Rome to master the antique collections, and returned to find the most powerful patroness in France waiting for him: Madame de Pompadour installed him in her own apartments at Versailles and set him to work commemorating the great events of Louis XV's reign in precious stone. She was so captivated by the art that he taught her to practice it herself. The fruits of their collaboration were gathered into an elegant volume of prints, engraved by the marquise after Guay's stones and distributed to favoured courtiers — one of the more exquisite vanities of a deeply vain age. After Pompadour's death in 1764 the commissions dried up, and with Guay the art itself

seemed to expire; a critic writing in 1819 lamented that France had produced no worthy gem engraver since his time.

[7] Thomas Arthur, comte de Lally (1702–1766) was a soldier of Irish Jacobite stock whose life ended on the scaffold in one of the most flagrant judicial murders of the ancien régime. Born in Dauphiné to an exiled Irish family, he served France with distinction for decades — at Fontenoy, at Falkirk alongside Bonnie Prince Charlie, under Marshal Saxe in the Low Countries — before being sent to India in 1758 to command French forces against the British. Brave but volcanic in temperament, he alienated every officer and administrator around him, and when the campaign collapsed he became the perfect scapegoat. He returned voluntarily to France to face trial, was denied counsel and documentation alike, and after two years of proceedings was beheaded at the Place de Grève in 1766 — the executioner requiring several blows to finish the job. Even Voltaire, who had no personal fondness for him, was appalled, and spent his final years campaigning for his rehabilitation. The dying philosopher's last letter, written upon learning that an appeal had finally been granted, expressed joy that the king had proved himself a defender of justice. It was cold comfort: the conviction itself was never fully cleared.

[8] Arthur Dillon, comte de Dillon (1670–1733) was one of the most distinguished of the *Wild Geese* — those Irish Catholic soldiers who followed the defeated Jacobite cause into French exile and made France's armies their adopted home. Born in

County Roscommon to a family that lost both parents in the Williamite wars, he arrived in France at twenty with his regiment and spent the next four decades fighting across Italy, Flanders, Spain, the Rhine and the Pyrenees, accumulating honours and promotions with remarkable consistency. It was his Irish regiment that saved the French army at Cremona in 1702, holding the Po gate against Prince Eugene of Savoy when the French commander himself had already been taken prisoner. Louis XIV rewarded him with a French comté in 1711. In parallel he served as a tireless Jacobite agent, working to keep the Stuart cause alive at the French court and conspiring with Sweden's Charles XII for an invasion of England. He died at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in 1733 — the same palace where the exiled Stuart court had lived out its long, fading vigil — leaving behind a regiment, a title, and a family whose military and ecclesiastical branches would continue to serve France with equal distinction for another generation.

[9] James FitzJames, 1st Duke of Berwick (1670–1734) was one of those figures whose very existence reads like a novelist's contrivance: the illegitimate son of James II and Arabella Churchill, he was thus the nephew of the Duke of Marlborough — the great English general against whom he would spend much of his career fighting on the opposing side. Born and raised in France, he served his father in Ireland, transferred his loyalties seamlessly to Louis XIV, and rose to become one of the finest commanders of the age,

earning his Marshal's baton in 1706. Equally honoured by the courts of France and Spain, he accumulated ducal titles from both crowns, even as his English title had long since been stripped from him by attainder. His death was as dramatic as his life: a cannonball took his head cleanly from his shoulders at the Siege of Philippsburg in 1734 — a soldier's end, if a violent one, that at least spared him the slower indignities of age and obscurity.

[10] Lough Leane (from Irish *Loch Léin*, meaning "Lake of Learning") is the largest of the three Lakes of Killarney in County Kerry, Ireland.

[11] Lac Léman (also known as Lake Geneva) is the largest freshwater lake in Western Europe, covering approximately 580 km^2. This crescent-shaped lake is shared between Switzerland (about 60%) and France (about 40%), with the Alps and the Jura mountains providing a dramatic backdrop.

[12] Robert-François Damiens (1715–1757) was a dismissed domestic servant who, on a January afternoon in 1757, slipped past the royal bodyguard at Versailles and stabbed Louis XV with a penknife — inflicting a wound barely deeper than a pinprick through the king's thick winter coat, yet throwing the entire kingdom into panic. His motives remain murky: apparently unhinged by the religious quarrel between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, he seems to have held the king personally responsible for the misery it caused. He made no attempt to flee. What followed was among the most horrifying spectacles the ancien régime ever staged: after

weeks of torture he was publicly dismembered by horses at the Place de Grève, the executioner first having to cut his tendons to allow the horses to do their work, his torso reportedly still living when consigned to the flames. He was the last person in France to die by this method. Casanova watched for four hours and could barely stand it; the ladies of quality in the crowd, he noted with sardonic wonder, did not flinch at all. Voltaire, Beccaria, Dickens, Foucault and Thomas Paine all returned to Damiens in their own ways — less as a man than as a symbol of everything that was wrong with the world that had produced him.

[13] Vert-Vert (or Ver-Vert) typically refers to a famous 1734 satirical poem by Jean-Baptiste Gresset, which tells the humorous story of a well-travelled, foul-mouthed convent parrot. This popular cultural figure has since inspired various adaptations and uses across French literature, art, and language.

[14] The Seven Years' War (1756–1763) was, as Winston Churchill later observed, the first true world war — fought not only across Europe but in North America, India, the Caribbean, West Africa and the Philippines simultaneously. Its origins lay in the unfinished business of the War of the Austrian Succession and a startling diplomatic revolution: France and Austria, traditional enemies, found themselves allied against Britain and Prussia, traditional rivals who had now made common cause. In Europe the war pivoted on Frederick the Great's audacious defence of Prussia against a

coalition of vastly superior powers — Russia, Austria, France and Sweden — a survival act of military brilliance and sheer endurance that came within a whisker of total collapse before Russia's sudden withdrawal in 1762 saved him. Elsewhere the results were transformative: France lost Canada, most of its Indian presence, and its navy was crippled; Britain emerged as the dominant colonial and naval power on earth. The peace, however, planted the seeds of the next conflict — a humiliated France began quietly rebuilding the fleet that would tip the American Revolutionary War against Britain barely fifteen years later.

[15] François-Joachim de Pierre de Bernis (1715–1794) was that rarest of combinations: a genuinely gifted poet who was also a capable diplomat, and a churchman who contrived to be charming rather than pious. Born to an impoverished noble family in the Ardèche, he made his way to Paris and into the favour of Madame de Pompadour through the wit of his verses — Voltaire, not always generous with rivals, called him *Babet la bouquetière*, the little flower-girl, a nickname that was affectionate and slightly barbed in equal measure. Pompadour installed him in the Tuileries at her own expense and launched his career in earnest. He rose to Foreign Secretary, helped negotiate the alliance with Austria that drew France into the Seven Years' War, then fell from grace when he had the temerity to oppose the costs of that same war. Exiled to Soissons, he emerged as a cardinal, returned as Archbishop of Albi, and eventually settled into the French ambassadorship in

Rome, where he spent his final decades as a genial fixture of papal politics, a protector of French exiles, and a host of legendary hospitality — qualities which Casanova, who knew him well, was delighted to record for posterity.

XX.

There is but one pure joy the spirit may claim — that of doing good.

In the fullness of such a mood — in that gentle elation which pervades the heart after one has performed a worthy act — Patrick made haste to return and acquaint Deborah with the welcome news. "Saved — he is saved!" cried he, rushing into her embrace. "Tomorrow his grace is mine to give — tomorrow he walks forth a free man!"

Deborah rejoiced with him in perfect earnestness. One is so fortunate to see one's beloved doing well by others; one is made so susceptible by their susceptibility; one is ennobled by their very nobleness.

Things went very differently at the Company: when, at the dinner hour, Patrick announced his success in gaining Fitz-Harris his liberty, the gentlemen present, thrown into a state of stupefaction, strove amongst themselves — each

striving to outdo his neighbour — to appear pleased by the intelligence; yet their pleasure, such as it was, remained frigid and forced. The thought that so fine an act had been done by a man who compelled their regard against their will, done furthermore on behalf of one they held in dread, gave them exquisite discomfort; and it served besides as a tacit condemnation of their own hardness of heart and their sluggardly ways.

Following the meal, M. le marquis de Gave de Villepastour had Patrick brought before him. In his private room he met Patrick with a chilling frigidity, speaking in a voice high-handed and brusque such as he had never been wont to use in his dealings with Patrick.

"Mr Fitz-Whyte," he began, "defamatory whispers regarding your person have been making their way about the Company this past week. These reports have their origin in a letter dispatched to Fitz-Harris from the county of Kerry. I possess here a translated copy, which he has obligingly supplied."

And truly, Patrick knew at once his friend's handwriting.

"These circumstances admit of no doubt. I allow you the space of four-and-twenty hours to clear your name. Unless you can acquit yourself of these dishonourable imputations ere that time expires, your place among the Musketeers is

forfeit. My allegiance to the King forbids that I should let a malefactor stand any longer amongst the gentlemen of his guard. Well, sir — what have you to say for yourself?"

"Not a word. Never have I demeaned myself by answering slander, nor ever shall I. An honest man's life is his abiding vindication, and it is the sole vindication which becomes him."

"Am I to understand that you consider these reports false and malicious?"

"No, sir — it is not these reports I name calumnious, but rather the verdict passed by the judges of Tralee. That is the calumny of which I speak. To God our Lord I commit my cause."

"Please yourself in that. I, however, put my trust in human justice."

"By which you mean, sir, that tribunal which has condemned Mary Queen of Scots, Thomas More, Lady Jane Grey, Enguerrand de Marigny, the Maid, and King Charles — and drove the nails through the hands of our Lord."

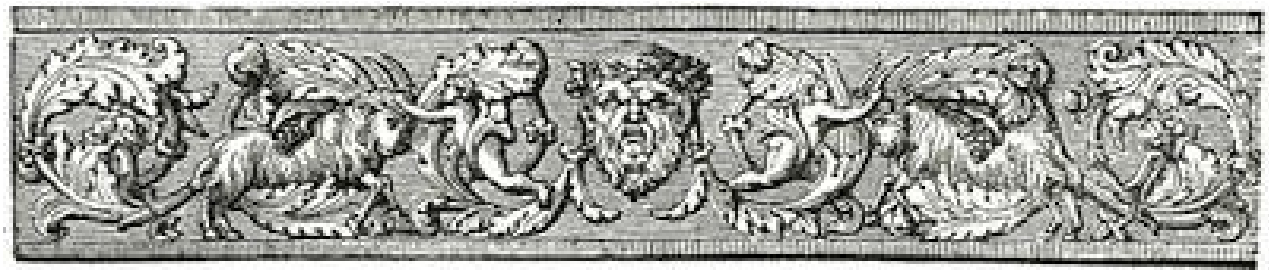
"Enough of this. Four-and-twenty hours are still yours."

Patrick, overwhelmed by a depth of sorrow, sought the solitude of his room and turned the key upon himself. In his wretchedness, he yet clung to faith in God's benevolence — who frequently, the better to test the fortitude of belief, takes

pleasure in afflicting His justest servants — and rather than rail against Heaven, he barely permitted himself a word of complaint. He yielded himself up; his thoughts went out to the wretches bearing sorrows of body joined to sorrows of heart, and he rendered thanks that the Lord had treated him with such comparative gentleness. Occasionally, nevertheless, courage forsook him; and he would weep as though a dam had burst when the spectres of the past laid siege to his imagination, presenting to him Deborah bleeding her life away under assassins' steel upon the road to Killarney, and raising up at Tralee quay a gibbet painted red, with his own image swinging from the rope. The whole night went by in restless torment, without his obtaining even the briefest repose: whenever he collapsed upon his bed, worn out by exhaustion, his eyes stayed open and stared fixedly as do the eyes of creatures that hunt by dark; fever made his blood race and pound as if he were being carried at furious speed upon a runaway horse. Whenever he rose from his bed, he paced his room with long strides, flung wide the casement, and knelt to pray with his face lifted skyward, his eyes roving across the starlit expanse above. Man prays never more purely nor more tenderly than when, upon the suffering earth, he finds himself separated from his heavenly hope by nothing save empty space; when the firmament and he are parted by immensity alone.

He likewise occupied himself, by way of filling the empty hours, with certain *Nights*[1] from a poem that had of late sprung forth quite suddenly from the murk hanging over the Thames. Dismal contemplations of death, oblivion, and things Everlasting — thoughts that ministered agreeably to his dejected state of mind.

[1] The reference is to Edward Young's The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality (1742–1745), one of the most widely read and influential English poems of the eighteenth century. Composed in blank verse and divided into nine "Nights," the work comprises extended philosophical meditations on mortality, grief, and the afterlife, written in response to a series of personal bereavements.



XXI.

Opening her eyes, Deborah found Patrick already there, seated near her feet, lost in contemplation of her sleeping face.

"What — you here, Phadruig, at this hour!" she cried aloud. "Lord, what a start you gave me!"

"Come, dress yourself, my love. There is something I must do, and I cannot go without you."

"But you seem so dejected! Such pallor! Are you unwell, Phadruig?"

"Aye."

"What is the matter, my own dear one?"

"Alas, I have this much to tell you: that without God's strength to bear me up, there would be naught in my heart save desperation and the wish for death. Ah, do not bestow your kiss there! Dishonour covers my brow! The magistrates

have tainted it, the headsman has set his brand upon it! I stand before you a murderer, a dastardly cut-throat, an outlaw condemned in absence!"

"Nay, nay, my own Patrick! You are none of this, Patrick — none of it!"

"Yet I am all of it, I say! Let the townspeople of Tralee speak — they looked on whilst I hung!"

"You know! But how? Cursed be the wretch who told you!"

"If only it were I alone to whom he had spoken! For a while past I have been in possession of the whole truth, dearest, though I said nothing to you of it. I had even cherished the hope of concealing forever that which you, too, were not ignorant of. But from whose lips did you hear it?"

"My departure from Ireland took place only at the time of that terrible deed. The trial I witnessed myself, and the sentence of the judges I heard pronounced. And having arrived here, I concealed everything from you, that you might be spared this very distress in which you are now plunged."

"But who stood as my pursuer in that tribunal?"

"My own father."

"The scoundrel — the base, contemptible scoundrel!"

"But who brought you this intelligence, Patrick?"

"Why, the whole world knows of it. It is but a few days since Fitz-Harris was in receipt of a letter from his brother, acquainting him with the matter. At once he made it known to all his comrades. Monsieur de Villepastour, upon whom we are calling this instant, has gone so far as to have it translated."

"The infamous creature! But Patrick, did I not warn you only yesterday but one? I told you then that you possessed too generous a heart, and that you would commit yourself to some action that nobody — least of all Fitz-Harris — would dream of doing for you! And do you mean to go to Versailles this very day, even now, to obtain his pardon for him?"

"Aye, I mean to."

"Oh Patrick, Patrick — you are generous to a fault!"

"And you, my Debby, are scarcely Christian at all in this."

"No, my Christian charity will never extend so far — offering up one cheek after the other has been smitten! I could never lower myself to kiss the hand that beats me, nor clasp with affection the foe who chokes me to death!"

Still speaking of the trial's particulars and the judicial sentence, they found themselves presently at the town house of the Marquis de Villepastour.

Entering, Deborah recognised him immediately — her impudent pursuer, that unknown dandy in his costume of

tender green — and a cry of mingled surprise and horror broke from her before she could master herself. Wishing to hide from Patrick what had occasioned her alarm, she made a show of having knocked into some article of furniture.

"To what do I owe this visit, Mr Fitz-Whyte?" enquired the Marquis in a tone of harsh incivility.

"Unless I am mistaken, you allowed me a day and a night to clear my name, sir."

"Clear your name to him? Never! Leave this place at once!" exclaimed Deborah, seizing Patrick by the arm and dragging him doorward. "Clear your name, my poor lamb, before the slavering mouth of such a wolf as this? It is goodness that stands accused by villainy here! No, no — come hence, Patrick! Come, my beloved!"

"Debby, you must let me speak! I implore you!"

"Speak? But to whom would you speak? There is nobody here, Patrick — not a single being here who could comprehend your words! What stands before you is no proper man! Faith he has none, nor law, nor God, nor heart, nor any spark of soul! A tiger is nobler, an ape more worthy, the meanest cur more honourable than he! What is he but a serpent, befouling all with his poisonous slime! Come, I say!"

As Deborah, her mind unhinged by bitter resentment, poured forth this torrent of dreadful accusations — this

searing rebuke of villainy by injured innocence that might have rent asunder any breast not utterly calcified by a life of dissipation — the Marquis de Villepastour stood with his elbows negligently planted upon the table, greeting her every sentence with a smile of deliberate insolence.

"You must excuse, sir, the shocking invective which Madame has seen fit to level at you. I am both amazed and grieved by it. Without question, her wits are unsettled. While pride and honour, together with the awful predicament in which I find myself, would normally prevent me from offering any defence whatever, my lord Marquis, yet since one word has the power to topple and obliterate from top to bottom the entire structure upon which my condemnation rests, and lay bare the sheer enormity of a sentence so ridiculous that it would insult the intelligence of an idiot — I have thought it right to pronounce that word before you. Here, then, it is: This woman here beside me in tears — young and fair, virtuous, faithful, unstained; this celestial being whom the Almighty, in His measureless benevolence, placed beside me as protector and friend when I was scarce more than a child; this fragment of Himself who fashioned her for me, she for whom I would spill my heart's blood drop by precious drop and weep away my very existence, she for whose sake I would die inch by agonising inch by every torture ever devised, if thereby I might shield her from the

merest twinge of discomfort; this woman who was mine, who is mine, whom I love and adore above all earthly things — my shrine, my devotion; this very woman, my gentle dove, my heart's treasure, my wedded bride, that sacred chalice which my lips dare approach only with reverend trembling — she it is whom they declare I murdered, whose throat they say I cut! This is the very woman — Miss Deborah, styled Countess of Cockermouth Castle — whose life I am charged with taking, whom I stand condemned for having assassinated like a craven villain, she in whose lifeblood, ferocious barbarian that they paint me, I am accused of washing my hands and slaking my unholy thirst! Ah God, the abomination of it! It shatters my very being — it unmakes me entirely!"

"I see no evidence, sir, that would confirm this person to be the Countess Deborah of Cockermouth Castle… Forgive me — pressing matters require me elsewhere. I can give you no more of my time."

With a demeanour suggesting he had been greatly put upon, the Marquis de Villepastour withdrew into an adjoining room and shut the door upon himself, leaving Patrick and Debby — who wept as they clung to one another — in the most uncivil manner imaginable.

Patrick made some enquiry of Deborah as to the cause of her furious attack upon Monsieur de Gave, but her answers were evasive and unclear.

XXII.

It wanted but the stroke of midday when Patrick passed into the château of Versailles, finding himself presently in Madame Putiphar's suite of rooms.

The sitting of the council had just broken up, and the ministers were taking their leave in no small degree of agitation.

His name was presently given, and he was straightway admitted to her company. She was alone amid inkstands, scrolled papers, and heaps of official documents, dressed with uncommon richness and turned out with that deliberate refinement which is never the work of an ordinary morning — that sort of studied elegance in dress which gives away the girl in her first sentiment as readily as it does the woman in her last.

"Mr Patrick," said she with an aspect of the tenderest regard, "you see before you the royal pardon which your persuasive voice and touching words have prevailed upon me to grant for Mr Fitz-Harris — your friend, as you have it. Now, if it be your wish to give me pleasure — and it is certainly mine to afford you satisfaction — then he must forfeit that title for evermore, a title that confers upon him an empty distinction but one that, as I see matters, cast upon you a shadow of grave impropriety. Take my advice and have done with all association with this reckless fool. It is the first time I have ever signed away the punishment for such an offence. I may truthfully say, however, seeing that I grant it on your account, that were you the supplicant in those earlier cases as well, this present pardon in all likelihood would not be making history. Left to my own feelings, which would find it a hardship to turn you away unsatisfied, I had freely given this insignificant Mr Fitz-Harris his release with no strings attached. But the interests of State security and my own protection alike insist that he take himself out of France ere a week is out."

"It was a worthy deed you had done, Madame, and a magnanimous one. Wherefore should remorse arrive to set limits upon it? But wisdom has governed your course, Madame, and my humble faculties abase themselves before it precisely as I abase myself at your feet."

Even as Patrick knelt there giving vent to such expressions of thankfulness as he could muster, pressing his lips repeatedly to the hem of Madame Putiphar's dress, from an adjacent chamber there came a masculine voice crying: "Pompon! They've adjourned the council, surely! Are you coming or not? The whole of my breakfast is waiting."

Next, a door opened partway.

Then the voice took on a note of irony and said: "Ah! A thousand pardons, Madame — I did not know you were otherwise occupied."

"Why, no — pray enter without the least constraint. There's nobody here you need worry about," Madame Putiphar answered. "Monsieur is a friend of mine, you see, and altogether fit to be yours too."

Thereupon she spoke quietly into Patrick's ear: "Many matters remain for us to speak of, but come to me at Trianon tomorrow night — you shall sup with me. Farewell. Off you go."

"The frying-pan's been at work," the same voice went on, "and I came in to let you sample my buttered eggs."

Patrick accordingly stood up and was turning to go, but no sooner had he done so than he started back in surprise and immediately made his obeisance, for there before him stood Pharaoh[1] in kingly garb, complete with the blue sash, crosses

and stars, yet incongruously fitted out with a white kitchen apron, wielding a ladle in one hand whilst balancing a prodigious saucepan in the other.

"On your feet, Monsieur," said Pharaoh to Patrick in high good humour, "and thereupon I beseech the Almighty to hold you in His sacred keeping. How pleasing to discover, Pompon, that my person is so indelibly fixed in my subjects' bosoms that they make me out even when I'm dressed up as a turnspit!"

Such, then, was Pharaoh's method of enlivening a private existence that was altogether barren and perfectly nugatory: he would occasionally take his pleasure in doing… my pen rebels against writing the word… COOKERY!

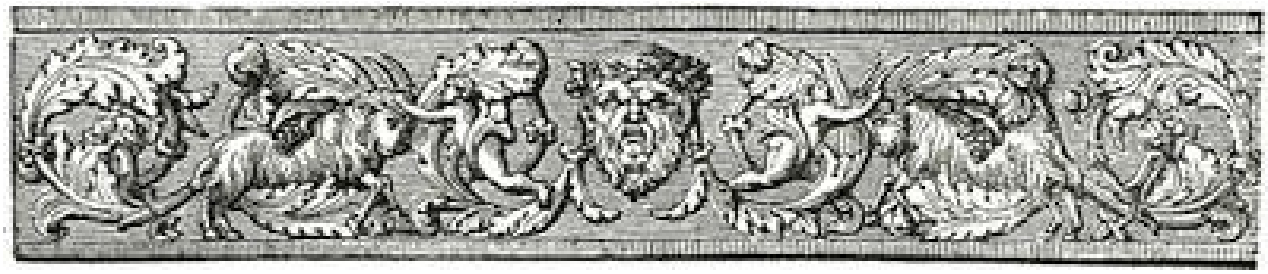
The instant Patrick found himself without, copious tears welled up and spilled down his face! Possessed of sensibility and greatness of spirit alike, he had been shaken to his innermost parts upon witnessing what they had reduced his King to.

Then his heart quite gave way, and the flood of his tears increased twofold, for as he passed through a picture-hung gallery his eyes chanced upon St Louis and Charlemagne![2]

[1] Pharaon (Pharaoh): The author's satirical pseudonym for the reigning monarch, almost certainly Louis-Philippe I (1773–1850), King of the French from 1830 to 1848. The choice of name is richly ironic: "Pharaoh" evokes both the absolute, quasi-divine authority of the ancient Egyptian rulers and the image of a despotic yet decadent civilisation in decline. Louis-Philippe, who came to power after the July Revolution of 1830, styled himself the "Citizen King" and deliberately cultivated bourgeois habits in contrast to the sacred majesty of the Bourbon monarchs. His domestic informality and middle-class tastes — carrying his own umbrella, receiving visitors in casual dress — made him a target of mockery from legitimist royalists (who considered him a usurper) and republicans alike. The scene of "Pharaoh" playing at cookery in royal regalia whilst his mistress conducts state business epitomises the author's contempt for what he perceives as the degradation of French kingship: a sovereign with pretensions to ancient grandeur reduced to the trivial amusements of private life, whilst the true powers of the throne are exercised by others. Patrick's subsequent tears before the portraits of

Louis IX and Charlemagne underscore this contrast between the sacred dignity of medieval kingship and its modern debasement.

[2] Louis IX (1214–1270), known as Saint Louis, King of France from 1226 to 1270. Renowned for his piety, justice, and personal austerity, he was canonised in 1297 and became the very model of Christian kingship. His reign represented the apogee of medieval French monarchy, and he was venerated for leading two Crusades and establishing France as Europe's foremost power. To a French royalist of the 1830s, he would epitomise the sacred dignity and moral grandeur of the throne. Charlemagne (c.742–814), or Charles the Great, King of the Franks and first Holy Roman Emperor. He united much of Western Europe, was crowned Emperor by Pope Leo III in 800, and became the legendary founder of both French and German monarchical traditions. His reign symbolised the fusion of classical civilisation, Christian faith, and royal authority — the very foundation of European kingship.



XXIII.

Patrick, furnished with his special order, betook himself immediately to the Bastille and ventured within that stone-built bull, not unlike the brazen bull of Phalaris[1], wherein the doomed were flung breathing still.

Having himself taken to Fitz-Harris, Patrick found him confined in a wretched underground chamber, its roof so mean a man could not stand upright; a damp and squalid hole it proved, admitting no fresher air than the pestilential reek from the ditches without, and receiving no daylight except a pale gleam filtering through a slit in the stone.

There he was stretched out on some mildewed stalks of straw, his visage buried in the dirt. Whether from stupor or the benumbing chill, he took no notice when his locks were unfastened.

Patrick called out to him in Irish: the prisoner, hearing in that ghastly den a companionable voice that filled it with the music of his birthplace, gave a violent shudder and lifted up his head.

"Up with you, Fitz-Harris; you are a free man!"

"What, you, Patrick! Oh, luckless fellow, rather the grave!"

"I am here to take you hence; your liberty is won; do you understand? Up, man, up!"

"What — I, at liberty! No, no — 'tis a fever-vision! The raving of madness! I cannot, will not believe it! No more fetters, no more prison-stone, no more gaolers with their cruelties? Fresh air and sky and flowers and women again? It cannot be true — that happiness is not laid up for such as I! I am a man already dead to hope; I know myself for what I am — why, in the darkness just past, I heard the very horologe of doom!"

"Nay, up and away, Fitz-Harris; we must be gone at once. Fortune is a fickle thing — she that opens doors oft slams them shut again in the same breath. Quick, man!"

"Dead, then — she is dead?"

"Dead? Who?"

"The she-devil! That abominable harlot, the Putiphar herself!"

"Quiet, Fitz-Harris; have done with such folly. What has escaped your lips even now would be cause enough, should you escape these walls, to see you flung back into this oubliette; and liberty not being yours yet, cause enough to consign you to that cistern where the nameless are swallowed up forever. Away, man; come along with me, for pity's sake! Here, take this — your reprieve, in writing."

Without a glance at its contents, Fitz-Harris snatched the letter away and crushed it between his fingers. He then lurched toward the entrance, swaying as he went; yet there he checked himself at once and said:

"Go with you, Patrick? Out upon it, no! Sense is coming back to me: I did you grievous wrong; I played you false; toward you I behaved as a recreant; you are surely my enemy now! You hate me! You are panting for vengeance! No, I tell you, I will not follow! Keeper, close up my cell; I will not stir from hence."

"Fitz-Harris, you mistake me — I am no foe of yours, you have done me no injury, and if perchance you did, all recollection of it has fled my mind. We are both hapless children of one motherland; I am your true companion, your brother bound to you by every tie. Your distrust rends my

very heart! Come then, trust me and follow; come, my friend, come with one who calls you brother."

"No, no! The walls of this place are shrewd advisers — they have made me suspicious and careful: you shall not lead me forth, foe that you are! What assurance have I that this is not treachery, and that yonder in that dismal hallway accomplices do not lurk, their axes poised to strike? Patrick! You have learnt well the craft of getting even! I make no doubt you sought out those who buried me here and offered: 'That prisoner is an embarrassment to you, and to me no less; shall my grudge be yoked to yours? Will you employ my arm? I stand ready.' So you present yourself to declare me free, when all the while it is death that awaits me past this stone. Ah! You know how to take your revenge, Patrick! Yet you deal fairly, you play me no false trick; for if it is death that waits yonder, then freedom waits on death's farther side. Aye! There only may mankind nurture any hope of meeting with it; that is, if it be not, like countless other glittering deceits, nothing but a vacant semblance. Go then! I am at your heels! Let come what comes! I refuse to play the poltroon; better a score of knife-wounds to the heart than to moulder away in this pit! Lead on, I am with you!"

With all the dread of one whose mind, maddened by prolonged anguish, teemed with ghosts and fearful imaginings, he pursued Patrick's steps, and witnessed, his

wonder growing at every step, how grating after grating, door after door, fell back to let them pass. When the last drawbridge was traversed and his dreads had utterly melted away, his delight broke out in frenzied raptures.... Then, directing his attention to his letter of reprieve he yet clutched in his clenched fist, and reading therein: *Upon the petition of M. Patrick Fitz-Whyte, and solely out of regard for him, we do hereby grant*.... he dropped to his knees at Patrick's feet, crying aloud:

"Patrick, Patrick! How generous you are! Oh! It is to you I owe my existence! Oh! How am I to testify enough recognition of this debt! I have insulted you so abominably! What unworthiness is mine! What wretchedness! I was faithless toward you! I could not bring myself to trust.... Can the damned conceive of Paradise! Forgiveness, I implore forgiveness for all the ill I have caused you! Henceforward my life entire shall have but one aim: to purge myself of the wrongs I have done you. I shall stop at nothing to restore myself to your favour; for whoever stands well in your regard must stand well in the sight of Heaven. Your friendship, though — never let me have it again, that would pollute its purity! Save it for souls more honest than mine has proved. Oh! Eternal shall be my recognition of this debt!"

"Fitz-Harris, I will have none of your thanks. You are indebted to me in nothing; I said to you that I avenged myself not with the sword; but nowhere did I say I renounced all

retribution; this, therefore, is how I take my revenge: a good deed rendered for an ill one received. Mine is a crueller revenge, I warrant, than could be achieved with weapons — what think you? To make one who abhors you offer up prayers for you, though he fight against it, in that interior sanctuary where conscience sits in judgement; to make a man redden, to die of mortification before one of his own kind; there you have, except I err, a proper revenge! What think you of that, Fitz-Harris? We stand even now, I should think?"

[1] Phalaris (c. 570–554 BC), tyrant of Akragas (Agrigentum) in Sicily, was said to have commissioned a hollow bronze bull from the Athenian craftsman Perillos, into which condemned men were placed alive; a fire lit beneath roasted them to death, whilst an arrangement of pipes and stops within the bull's head converted their screams into a sound resembling the bellowing of a living beast. The device became one of antiquity's most notorious emblems of ingenious cruelty. The comparison with the Bastille is characteristically pointed: just as the bull's exterior concealed the agonies within, so the fortress's massive stonework hid from the world the suffering of its inmates.

XXIV.

It was whilst Patrick attended Madame Putiphar at Versailles that the Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, emboldened to try his fortune anew, made so bold as to return to the Hôtel Saint-Papoul.

He had steeled himself for quite another scene, but Deborah received him with such courteous ease, such poised elegance, that he found himself unaccountably thrown off balance.

With full formality she conducted him — pronouncing each of his names, his baptismal appellations, his seigneurial dignities, his military grades and titles — into the self-same little salon that had so recently been the scene of his importunities and his swift mortification.

"I have been quite overpowered, my lady, by the obligation I feel to thank you for your forbearing discretion

on my account," he observed with an oily civility, arranging himself upon the sopha. "For unless I am much mistaken, Mr Fitz-Whyte seemed this morning to know nothing whatever of my addresses to you, nor of that trifling unpleasantness of the other day. The surprise you showed upon recognising me had come perilously close to giving the game away; yet your generosity and presence of mind at once made good that inadvertent gesture. It is more goodness, Countess, than I had warrant to hope for from you, who dealt with me so very harshly. You have dropped some healing drops into my afflicted heart. In my present transport I allow myself to believe that I stand less entirely beneath your contempt — indeed, my vanity and my boldness have ventured so far as to set alight again the taper of my hopefulness at the sacred fire of that devotion which has burned, and ever shall burn, for you alone in my bosom!"

"Monsieur, should you wonder why I have kept from my husband the outrages you have heaped upon me, and why this morning I did not identify for him the gentleman who has so assiduously devoted himself to offering me insult — know that it was on his account, not on yours, on his account entirely, that I shrank from overwhelming him with yet another sorrow when his heart was already near to breaking beneath his wretchedness. I must ask you, if you please, to place no other construction upon my behaviour — most

especially, do not construe it as any mark of regard for you. Such a misapprehension would be injurious to me, certainly, but it would also make you wonderfully absurd, a consideration to which you should be rather more alive."

"Are you aware, heartless woman, that this morning, with Fitz-Whyte looking on, you misused me shamefully, you attacked me with no small virulence? In your telling of things, I — so artless, so pure of heart — am nothing short of a towering monument to wickedness. So I am! But acknowledge at least that I am not ungenerous, for I would cheerfully trade all the transgressions that weigh upon my soul to have you share with me in a certain charming little wickedness. But a man might as well hold his tongue for all the good it does with you. You are quite the little deity, but a deity of marble, worthy of no better station than a niche in some marble sanctuary. You refuse the living shrine of my affections, and yet within that holy place you should be as safely concealed, seeing that you set such store by respectability, as ever young Joash[1] was hidden in the temple of God. And who knows but that, like him, you would advance from that sanctuary to occupy a throne. As I have already observed, lovely one — you will forever be wasted anywhere save at Versailles. At present you would stand an excellent chance there. Put yourself in my hands entirely. Madame Putiphar is thoroughly passé; her star has set; her power hangs by a thread; Pharaoh

has had his fill of her. A stranger would prove most alluring to him — some unfamiliar charms would please his exhausted tastes wonderfully well."

"Keep talking, Monsieur le Marquis de Villepastour, keep talking! Let us mark how deep into the mire you will wade! I took you for a villain — I now perceive you are beneath all dignity!"

"You deal with me in rather cavalier fashion, my lady — you handle me like a dragoon. I fail to understand why I should handle you gently when you are spoiling for a fight. Come then — if it's war you want, let us have everything out in the open! You know full well of the sentence that has lately disgraced Mr Fitz-Whyte in Ireland — whether he be your friend, your paramour, or your spouse is immaterial! And doubtless you also know that a man under sentence who has failed to appear for judgment has no business serving amongst the Gentlemen of His Majesty's Guard? Mr Fitz-Whyte must be removed — I must discharge him formally and openly to make an example of the case. Nor can you be ignorant, for that matter, of my attachment or my whim concerning you! A whim which your disdain has inflamed and made persistent, which every hindrance you have thrown up has intensified into burning passion. I am in love with you, my fair lady, desperately in love! And see now to what lengths I will go: do you wish to save Fitz-Whyte?"

"That will do, Monsieur, that will do! I take your point abundantly. To what magnificent acts of generosity should such a princely soul as yours not aspire! You stand before me prepared to chaffer over a defenceless woman's honour as though you were buying horseflesh? A wasted effort, Monsieur! You come to entrap me, all helpless and guileless, in the labyrinthine folds of some crooked compact? I shall not be taken in — the Almighty illuminates my understanding! You desire that, in the expectation of preserving my soul from the infamy you have in store for it — and Patrick is that soul — I should yield myself to you, tormented and desperate... That manner of devotion surpasses my understanding entirely. And having despoiled me, were I to seek the payment for my degradation, you would mock me to my face, Satan!"

"I do not propose any bargain to you, my fair lady — only a straightforward exchange, your dishonour answering to mine. To surrender yourself to my wishes, you must betray your wifely honour; I, to preserve Fitz-Whyte, must betray my obligations as an officer. Fault for fault — we need neither of us feel any compunction before the other. Take my word for it, be wise — let us sink together into the pit of vice, and let us do so dressed for celebration, do so with merry hearts. It is said that at its uttermost depth lie blossoms where the most exquisite delights — outlawed delights — await those bold

enough to pass its dreadful borders and venture down its hideous precipices. We should not despise wickedness — it resembles those women of unprepossessing countenance who disgust the multitude. Yet frequently, as with such women, it harbours private graces that shelter unspeakable delights."

"Equipped with your double-dealing, your specious reasoning, your coaxing arts, you could be perilous to any woman forsaken by God. But for my part, let me assure you again, you are simply a pest. Get out, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"In that case, armed with audacity and brutality, let us find out what manner of man I prove to you."

"Stay where you are, Monsieur! I made provision for just such a moment — I am no longer defenceless here as I was on that former occasion. My composed bearing ought to have told you as much."

Speaking thus, Deborah had possessed herself of two pistols cached under one of the cushions of the settee.

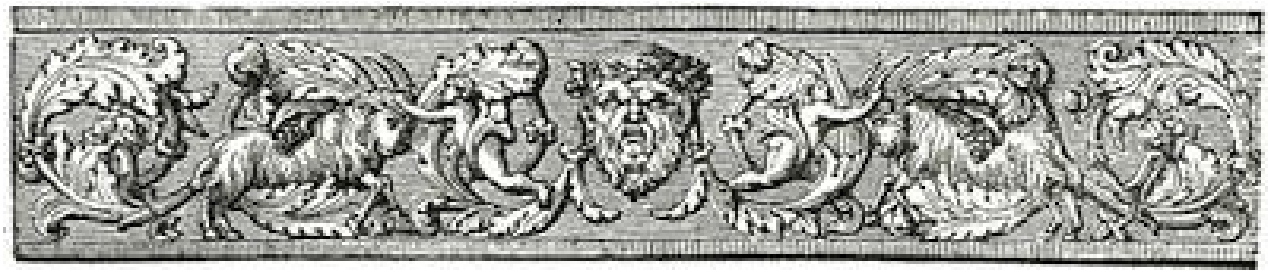
"If you approach me by even a footfall, you shall not live! Get out, I say to you — get out, I order you! Go parade your wickedness in another place! Do not darken this door again. Understand that I am a woman of firm purpose. On this occasion I have contented myself with warnings — should there be a next time, I shall omit them entirely."

"My lovely one, since that is how you mean to have it, I shall go. Do tranquillise yourself, I pray. Everything I proposed was meant for your benefit. It was, Countess, to rescue you from the bourgeois swamp where you find yourself bogged down, and with great generosity to shield Mr Fitz-Whyte from the dishonour that hangs over him. Set your mind at ease — you shall hear no more from me after today. Or if the fighting spirit should chance to possess me, I should only return accoutred in ancestral mail, clutching a dagger in one hand and a javelin in the other."

"Monsieur le Marquis, the assertion seems decidedly venturesome, according to what the chronicles tell us: your forebears polished armour but never wore any."

Monsieur de Gave, Marquis de Villepastour, had scarcely bargained for so clever a riposte to his gasconading. His mouth sealed shut and his aspect notably hangdog, he betook himself away, as Lady Deborah saw him off the premises, pistols clasped tight and manner most polite.

[1] Jehoash, also known as Joash (in King James Version), was the eighth king of Judah, and the sole surviving son of Ahaziah after the massacre of the royal family ordered by his grandmother, Athaliah. His mother was Zibiah of Beersheba. Jehoash was 7 years old when he ascended to the throne, reigning for 40 years.



XXV.

When our dandy reached his lodgings, there lay a letter from Madame Putiphar, couched in the kindest terms, entreating him to wait upon her with all possible speed.

Come the following day, he repaired to her petit lever[1] in that happy flutter which marks the courtier singled out for distinction.

"Ah! Marquis, how it delights me to see with what ardour you have hastened hither at my word!"

"Madame, I wish only that all your calls upon me should prove as pleasant as this."

"Say more honestly, Marquis, that you hope for none less calculated to touch your interest. A gentleman who counts so many victories among the fair cannot have found much

warmth in my note; or if warmth you discovered there, you must have wrung it from the words in defiance of my true meaning. Let me declare to you plainly, Marquis — I am not enamoured of you in any degree! I daresay this comes as a shock to you, accustomed as you are to being adored by all the fair sex! But do me the kindness, I beg, of regarding me as the exception; and we know that exceptions establish the validity of rules. Be tranquil, Marquis — do, I beg you, settle yourself at perfect ease! I pledge you my honour that seducing you forms no part of my intentions! Had only I been appointed to lead you into vice, depend upon it you would have perished as untouched as Newton, or the blessed Agnes, or Rose of Lima[2]."

"Yet is this, Madame, if I may ask — for I am ill-versed in such matters — the sense in which Newton's system is to be understood? If that be the meaning, then Monsieur Arouet de Voltaire might have saved himself the labour of producing a digest[3] expressly for ladies. What is more, ladies as a class, it must be said, have no great liking for things in summary form."

"Really, Marquis, you are going rather far — you crash through every nicety and bellow confidences from the rooftops!"

"But Madame, you yourself were but now pelting stones at my windows with your cruel witticisms, and doing so with no small audacity."

"Bless me, Marquis, what cause have you for grievance? You are something of a popinjay, surely? And must not all popinjays endure raillery?"

"Not all popinjays, I think, when the mockery comes from so charming a source."

"This gallantry will not come cheap for me, I suspect, Master Reynard[4]?"

"Nothing of the sort, Madame; imprisonment by royal warrant at worst, but the flattery itself is utterly without calculation."

"Come, Marquis, to business, for it was not to dally thus that I requested your presence. Among your musketeers there serves, I am told, a young Irish fellow named Patrick Fitz-Whyte?"

"That is so, Madame."

"What can you tell me of him?"

"A tall, awkward beanpole of a man."

"What rubbish! He seemed to me uncommonly good-looking."

"A kind of idiot, understanding the word in its Grecian and Gallic significations — to wit, a blockhead and a brute."

"Alas! I discovered in him a most winning intelligence. His fine flaxen hair, Marquis — what hue should you say it possesses?"

"Unsightly and ginger."

"Ah! There it is, Marquis — under the lion's hide I perceive the donkey's ears protruding! Your spirits have curdled into spite. Pray, what has this wretched boy done to injure you? What cause have you to speak ill of him?"

"What, I hold a grudge! No indeed, Madame. On the contrary, the fellow commands a very fine-looking woman in the field against me."

"A woman, you say?"

"A woman, or perhaps merely a girl."

"Truly beautiful, then?"

"Quite so."

"What a pity."

"Excepting your own self, Madame, she is the most complete beauty it has been my fortune to see."

"Ranking you where I may, Marquis, he remains the finest-looking and most agreeable gentleman of my acquaintance. So you have fallen in love with the woman?"

"Exactly so. And you have lost your heart to this woman's paramour?"

"Correct."

"A bad lot, that one."

"She is a foolish, overdressed bit of goods."

"Ranking you as I may, Madame, she remains the worthiest and most pure-minded young woman imaginable."

"Pure-minded! Marquis, have you any notion what that word means?"

"In truth, scarcely — yet I understand it better than the moral purity which that word is made to signify."

"Marquis, take my word for it: the virtue you speak of is no more than a sound."

"Well then, Madame, if this expression names a virtue which itself exists only as an expression, my poor faculties begin to give way — good heavens, this grows too metaphysical by half!"

"Know, then, that I make this young man my protégé. You shall use him with honour and bestow upon him whatever favours lie in your gift."

"Madame, I intend to discharge him on the morrow."

"Indeed you will not, or I shall be driven to shelter him myself."

"But Madame, he is a murderer — a man under capital sentence! They hanged him in Ireland not long since for having killed the daughter of the Earl of Cockermouth Castle."

"Why yes, if such were the case, Marquis, he would be a youth of vicious habits — a most perilous sweetheart. You say he put her to death?"

"Yes, murdered her — but in something of the way they murder on the stage, since it is for her sake that I languish unto death."

"I command you not to discharge him, Marquis, and not to visit upon him the most trifling humiliation."

"But Madame, willing as I am to serve your pleasure, I cannot maintain in my musketeers a murderer, one marked by legal infamy: the collective honour of my men will not allow it."

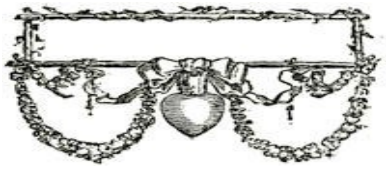
"Honour among the musketeers! Listen to him! Marquis, the two terms scream at being yoked together. In any case, if the honour of that regiment stands against it, honour of quite another sort insists upon it — you follow me, Marquis?"

"I am, Madame, your most obedient and faithful servant — but even so..."

"None of your conditions! You will wait several days, at the very least, until I either abandon him to you or arrange his

affairs otherwise. Till that time, let this be perfectly clear: you hold him in trust at the peril of your neck. With this understood, Monsieur le Marquis, may God preserve you in His blessed care. Go, and see that you do as I have directed."

Whereupon the Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, with a kiss upon her hand, made his exit.



[1] The *petit lever* was an intimate morning reception, part of the elaborate ritual surrounding the daily toilet of French aristocracy, particularly at Versailles and in fashionable Parisian society. Distinguished from the *grand lever*, which was a more public and ceremonial affair involving a larger audience of courtiers and officials, the petit lever was restricted to a select circle of intimates and favoured visitors. During this private audience, the lady or gentleman of rank would receive guests while completing their morning preparations — dressing, arranging hair, taking chocolate or light refreshment. It was considered a mark of particular favour to be admitted to someone's petit lever, as it signified membership in their inner circle. The practice reflected the theatricality of aristocratic life, where even the most private moments became occasions for social performance and the cultivation of patronage. By the early 19th century, when this novel was written, the petit lever had become something of an archaic custom associated with the ancien régime, though it persisted in certain aristocratic households and served

novelists as a convenient emblem of old-world refinement and privilege.

[2] The juxtaposition here is deliberately playful and slightly irreverent. Sir Isaac Newton was widely reputed to have died a virgin, a detail that fascinated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as much for its curiosity as for what it suggested about the single-minded dedication of genius. Saint Agnes (c. 291–304) was an early Christian virgin martyr who, according to tradition, refused marriage and consecrated her virginity to God, suffering martyrdom at approximately thirteen years of age. Saint Rose of Lima (1586–1617) was the first Catholic saint born in the Americas, renowned for her extreme asceticism and her preservation of perpetual virginity despite pressure to marry.

[3] François-Marie Arouet, known as Voltaire (1694–1778), published his *Éléments de la philosophie de Newton* (Elements of Newton's Philosophy) in 1738. This work was indeed designed to make Newtonian physics accessible to a broader French audience, including fashionable society and women readers who were excluded from formal scientific education. Voltaire's mistress, Émilie du Châtelet, herself an accomplished mathematician and physicist, collaborated with him on understanding Newton's work.

[4] This is an allusion to the medieval Roman de Renart, a cycle of satirical tales featuring Reynard (or Renart) the Fox, a cunning trickster figure who outwits other animals through guile and flattery. The tales, immensely popular throughout

Europe from the 12th century onward, made "Reynard" synonymous with cleverness, duplicity, and strategic flattery. The name became so ubiquitous that in French the word renard (originally goupil) itself came to mean "fox." La Fontaine's Fables, widely read in educated French society, reinforced these associations, particularly in "Le Corbeau et le Renard" ("The Crow and the Fox"), where the fox's honeyed words serve his appetite.

XXVI.

Patrick arrived at Trianon[1] upon the stroke of nine.

A servant, posted in expectation of his coming, led him directly to a little salon, in which Madame Putiphar reclined with careless grace upon a couch, trailing her fingers still more carelessly over the strings of a mandolin.

Before her, aromatic gums of Arabia sent up their vapours.

Clematis and bindweed wreathed the casement, which gave upon the fragrant evening wind; or, since we must bow to the poetical affectations now in vogue, upon the languid whispers of that lover who woos the goddess of flowers.

The divan, the sopha, the ottoman, wrought upon designs of François Boucher[2], stood as the most capriciously fantastic achievements of Borromini's[3] disciples — the votaries, that is, of the writhing and disquieted line.

Such twisting tracery and baroque embellishment of surface and curve — if the technical parlance be permitted — must have demanded an inventive force that stood in very near relation to genius, or was perchance genius entire.

Which matter I must leave undecided until a congress of worthies — assembling Sophocles alongside the Abbé de Voisenon[4], Theocritus beside Vadé[5] , Leonardo with Watteau, Cervantes with Saint Augustine — shall have established beyond cavil in what constant guise genius makes itself known, and whether that guise be the severe line or the fantastical curlicue[6].

Table, guéridon[7], consoles, and flower-stands bore a profusion of vases in porcelain from Madame Putiphar's Sèvres works[8], all of them filled to abundance with flowers both uncommon and sweet-scented. A lustre of rock-crystal and candelabra of gilt silver — more fantastically ornamented even than the furnishings — bearing tapers decorated with guilloche-work[9], cast their light over this exquisite seraglio. A seraglio, indeed, and no mere boudoir, for there was about it all a quality distinctly Eastern, scarcely in the visible design, but abundantly in the governing conception.

Here was no mere rococo fancy draped in Oriental veils, after the manner of Crébillon the son[10] — here was the genuine spirit of the Orient arrayed in rococo dress.

One has seen it asked now and again what, in that era so unfavourable to Eastern tastes, could have swung French regard towards the Orient; what could have imparted to the French understanding so sweeping a bias; what could have engendered a passion so absolute that any work of imagination, intellect, or contemplation, any product of art or of luxurious craft, stood in absolute want of stamping itself, more or less deeply, with some hue or shape drawn from Persia, China, Hindostan, Turkey, or Araby, if it were to meet with any approbation.

The fashion has been explained by some as proceeding from the Abbé Galland's[11] translation of the *Thousand and One Nights*; by others as springing from the Indian campaigns, or from other causes of like significance.

The question, if it is to be thoroughly illuminated, calls for enquiries and an analysis we are in no position to conduct — and certainly not here. I believe, notwithstanding, that we should not search among fortuitous happenings for a motive that the nation and the Court possessed of their own essence.

Only a species of moral license wholly Eastern in quality had given rise to this rapport and harmony of sentiment.

Luxurious ease, the pursuit of sensual gratification, incest, polygamy, Greek vice, the worship of gaiety, a Saracen mode of courtship rather than knightly devotion, bondage,

and most tellingly the indifference to bondage — by these means had two peoples, so thoroughly unalike in innumerable respects, been made similar.

Indeed, Pharaoh boasted his select sultana, his deer-park of concubines, his royal letters of confinement, as completely as Mustapha could claim his harem and his strangling-silks.

The very Christian creed that had given Aesop his dignity was swept away. All devotion centred upon Hercules and Venus, upon physical might and physical comeliness. Gone was melancholy, gone was chastity, gone was modesty, gone was meditation, gone was contemplative dreaming; all that was grand, all that was profound, all that was tragic, all that was sublime had vanished! To contemplate the endless majesty of the Almighty — ridiculous! The fashion now ran to Mahomet and his mirth, Mahomet and his sensual delights, Mahomet and his dark-eyed houris[12].

Islam pure and simple was the reigning faith: in very truth, under French wigs and whalebone hoops dwelt minds as Mahometan as any beneath the turban and the Moorish robe.

Blossoms, tapers, sweet scents, divans, porcelain, satin ribbons, damascened silk, a voice of melody, a mandolin, looking-glasses, gems, brilliants, chains of gold, circlets, hanging ear-jewels, a woman lovely, elegant, stretched in

languid ease!... What greater enticement could imagination devise? Must not such a scene utterly unsettle a youthful heart, so prone to ardent emotion, and encountering for the first time the mysteries of a lady's private chamber? Who amongst us, happy enough to gain entrance to that most private retreat of the female domain, has not trembled with voluptuous feeling beneath the spell of unfamiliar magic?

Stunned and bedazzled by so much splendour, so much magnificent display, so much sorcery, Patrick stood for a few instants caught between wonder and uncertainty; then, acting upon a sudden passion, he threw himself upon his knees before Madame Putiphar and placed his quivering lips upon her Indian babouches, worked in gold and studded with gems.

Savouring his ingenuous enthusiasm and the gratifying conquest she had achieved over his fancy, she allowed her gaze to descend upon him, from the throne of her languid unconcern, with a smile to match the one upon her lips.

A feeling of gentle sweetness, long since forgotten and consequently appearing as fresh as the maiden flutter of affection in a girl's bosom, bedewed her decayed soul. Her frame, ravaged by libertine indulgence and incapable now of responding to even the most violent excitements, melted in ecstasy at the innocent touch of a mouth upon her slipper.

There could no longer be any doubt; a love which by means of sensual feeling had made shy advances upon her heart had all at once thrust itself deep inside and now blazed there in complete supremacy.

As daylight wanes and the shadows gather, the sky will occasionally seem to kindle anew into magnificence; such twilight flames blaze more intensely and more radiantly than the fires of noontime.

It bore no resemblance to that love rich in trustfulness, in fanciful delusion, in joyful unreason, in fervent devotion, which comes to waking in the season of youth. This was love that devoured with jealousy, love that tormented with anxiety, love schooled in every vice, love ravenous for sensual pleasure; this was passion of the flesh alone. Such love lies so far removed from those first affections which raise up the mind, develop the intellect, dignify the soul, awaken self-sacrifice, and set the heart free, that it contains not one sentiment refined enough or elevated enough to admit of expression; not one notion that might be exhaled like sweet incense; nothing indefinite, nothing contemplative; nothing speaks in it save the senses, and they in raucous tones; finally, it is a love empty, lifeless, and brutish when at rest; brazen, relentless, and merciless when provoked or slighted.

Patrick, having offered her the tokens of respectful devotion, rose to his feet; she bade him sit beside her with

that air of easy magnificence she could so well assume, and Patrick, as he complied, ventured to say:

"Only just now, as I came into this bower worthy of the fae, in the very midst of my intoxication, I heard sweet harmonies — voice and guitar intertwined — that seemed to caress my very hearing. That voice was yours, Madame? Why should it fall to me to play the rude peasant, trampling into this sequestered glen and putting to flight the philomel's sweet strain! You must forgive me, Madame, this bucolic flight of fancy and the maladroit part I find myself playing."

"So you unite the poet and the courtier — as poetical as M. Dorat[13], as gallant as M. de Richelieu[14]. Yours is a spirit of rare perfection, Sir Patrick."

"Madame, your kind words and forbearance flow as freely as the largeness of your heart permits; but I must ask your permission to decline the dual honours of versifier and chevalier you are pleased to award me; were Providence to have favoured me with such endowments, neither M. Dorat nor M. de Richelieu, I assure you, would have served as my exemplars. Young and Bayard[15], rather."

"Young — the fashionable wool-gatherer?"

"Just so, Madame."

"And Bayard — that insufferable precisian?"

"Fearless and beyond reproach, Madame."

"What uncommon views you hold on the conduct of life. I know not what gain you think to make of such beliefs, Monsieur," answered the Putiphar peevishly, her vanity pricked by words so stern.

"Even so, Madame, I shall not be deceived in my expectations; I have never thought to derive worldly advantage from my sentiments or my actions; my belief is simply this: that good breeds good in its turn."

Their talk was acquiring a sober tone quite at odds with what the Putiphar had in mind; so she brought it to a swift end with a question flung out rather brusquely.

"I daresay you are something of a musician, Sir Patrick?"

"Not to the degree I might wish for my pleasure."

"Oh! Sing me something from the land of your birth!"

"Granted that I often find myself, like some son of Judah by the Babylonian waters, sitting in tears whenever Zion rises in my thoughts, nevertheless my harp remains with me and hangs not from the willows, and you shall not hear me say, Madame: *How might I sing the songs of God in a land not my own?*[16] Seeing that the lady before me is no enemy to the God I serve. Whatever music might delight you, Madame, I am ready to sing; but I confess to some anxiety that our ballads — which are plain things, deliberate in tempo and rich in sentiment — will strike you as unendurable, familiar as you

are with the fashionable airs from the stage. I ask only one thing in return, and that is the favour of hearing you finish the air my unfortunate arrival cut short."

"Oh! Nothing more than that, Sir Patrick?... I should tell you there was but one stanza left, and it goes like this:"

Madame Putiphar essayed a little flourish on her mandolin by way of introduction, and then took to sighing the words in a voice of liquid sweetness, overflowing with sensibility, rhythmic perfection, and no small degree of theatrical pretension:

Iris, 'midst all those gallants bound by your command,
To which will you extend your hand —
To the periwig of golden or of dusky shade,
To him by Fortune's smiles well-paid?
Ah! should I not rejoice indeed
If the most ardent heart should win the meed.

"How very agreeable the melody is, wouldn't you say? It marries wonderfully with the daintiness of the poem."

"Though perhaps I, an ignorant man, ought not to say so, it struck me as more pleasing when I stood outside. Would you not say it was rather flat and full of airs? Don't the verses seem to you quite silly?"

"Bless me! What are these words you speak, my dear? Such sentiments, if made public, would do you no small injury in the world's estimation. A song written by our foremost poet and set to music by our most respectable and sought-after composer!"

"Madame, I repeat — I am nothing more than a Danubian rustic[17]."

"I cannot tell you which suitor won Iris, but if the question were put to me, Sir Patrick, I should know my answer at once; I should not waver for any length of time between the golden periwig and the sable one. Fie upon the dark wig!"

"Fie upon the fair wig!"

"Ah! Patrick, you should not disparage so your handsome mane, bright as Phoebus's own! You do not think nearly well enough of yourself. It is clear to me that you must be loved first if you are ever to give love yourself. You might at least suffer yourself to be loved."

"Madame, I do not guard myself against love."

"It is dreadfully warm tonight, don't you find?"

"Yet not quite so severe as on recent nights."

"I am stifling all the same… Why, I have on only this light peignoir, as you can see."

Saying this, Madame Putiphar gave herself over to certain enticing little mannerisms: she pulled at her robe and let it fall half-open, as if without the least design, and was pleased to display for Patrick her rounded shoulders, her attractive bosom, her shapely décolletage, and her fair legs, which retained both the freshness of youth and a pleasing symmetry, and for twenty years had formed the chief delight of Pharaoh.

In the face of such a scene Patrick preserved, so far as could be seen, considerable indifference; his glances, though, flaring up without warning, would occasionally fix themselves with unmistakable desire upon such expressive flesh; and the Putiphar, guessing at his perturbation, blew upon this fire with postures of the utmost excitement and a laxity of conduct positively sinful. Inside him there fought a savage war: ardour against rationality, craving against what he owed to honour. He was fully sensible of every tacit overture the Putiphar was making; his senses were alive to them, his blood seethed in his veins, he shook as one fevered. Like a hand that could not be seen, something was bowing him over her as one might lean above a bloom to take in its sweetness. Whenever, his wits quite bewildered, he sensed he was about to hurl himself upon that ravishing form and give it kiss after lingering kiss, he would clutch the settee with both hands and rein himself in by sheer violence of will.

But afterwards, when some degree of composure came back to him and he thought of all the pollutions that flesh must have suffered, whereon there might not remain one place yet undefiled for his mouth to rest, it was as if an iron screen descended to separate them, a chill seized his senses, and his rational mind, like some great hammer, beat his desires into fragments and powder, and there, hovering like a spirit over the ruins, rose the figure of Deborah.

Fatigued by such inner warfare, and apprehensive lest he should ultimately falter and be caught fast in a temptation beyond resistance, to snap the spell in one swift motion, he stood up and took to pacing around the edges of the little chamber, scrutinising the paintings and the decorated panelling piece by piece.

But Madame Putiphar, wishing to draw the escaping victim back to the place of immolation, said to Patrick:

"Pray come back and sit beside me, Monsieur; I have not let you off: make good your debt, match my arietta with one of your own — you pledged me one of your country's airs."

"I do not forget, Madame, all that I owe to your kindness."

"Well then, come here, you mischievous creature!…"

To keep his distance further would have been an act of obvious rudeness on Patrick's part. So he came back and

resumed his seat upon the sopha in the same spot, picked up the mandolin, and launched into a lengthy ballad.

During the whole time Patrick sang this hymn-like air, Madame Putiphar remained in something approaching a trance, bestowing upon him all her attention and all her looks: she gazed at him with the gratified expression of a mother enchanted by her child's engaging graces, or of a mistress who inwardly applauds herself for the beauty of the prize her lucky choice has won. She gloried in having made this conquest, prizing both his comeliness and his youth; she offered herself silent felicitations that fortune should have set aside for her, despite the encroachment of age upon her own person, so youthful and unspoiled a quarry.

Once Patrick brought his ballad to a close, she expressed her gratitude with displays that were almost frantic in their intensity, seizing his hands and holding them to her breast, which was rising and falling rapidly.

"All in you is faultless, my lord; your voice holds one spellbound and enchants the ear; it is at once mellow and natural; the manner in which you control it shows a delicacy and accomplishment quite exceptional. Had I not enjoyed the privilege of hearing you, I would have thought a gift of song like yours could be found nowhere but in Naples."

"Madame, my countrymen have always had a singular talent for music and have invariably treated it with honour and devotion. In the most distant past, so Dryden informs us, the Irish were supremely skilled at striking the harp, and one could not enter a single house without spying this instrument mounted on the wall, kept there whether for the master's enjoyment or for the use of callers and guests. The rudest countryfolk remain to this day profoundly responsive to its enchantments. Whoever approaches a cottage door with a lute in hand is greeted with the fullest honour and hospitality; the family at once widens its circle to admit him; any wandering minstrel is treated as one more member of the family, he sits down with them round the pot of potatoes and claims his share of the bacon and milk. We treat the minstrel as we do the lark — the sowing is done that he may be fed. Give me this mandolin, Madame, and I could make the entire tour of Ireland without ever knowing hardship, and each cottage would be to me a capitol wherein I should enjoy a triumph — not as showy and dramatic as those celebrated in Italy, I grant you, but more genuinely moving and more agreeable to my spirit, which is humble, reserved, and inclined to shun notice."

"The language in which you sang flows with harmony and teems with vowels and melodious word-endings. Out of sheer ignorance I took it to be graceless and rough like the

common English tongue; you must excuse me for that error, Sir Patrick."

Truth be told, the Irish language is a magnificent thing, endowed with all the spirit of southern climes, though it shall not be long for this world, English having already swept across whole counties. Save in Spanish alone, one searches in vain for words so beautiful, so resonant, so stately. One need only examine the proper names — surely nothing exists more pompous than such as these: Barrymore! Baltimore! Connor! Magher esta Phana! Orrior! Slego! Mayo! Costello! Burrus! Killala! Ballinacur! Kinal-Meaki! Pobleobrien! Offa! Iffa! Arra! Ida! Killefenora! Inchiquin! Rossennalis! Banaghir! Corcomroe! Tunnichaly! Clonbrassil!

It was not, however, any genuine admiration for these beauties that prompted Madame Putiphar to depreciate English and fan the flames of Patrick's glorious patriotism with her honeyed words; she acted rather from motives decidedly treacherous. She knew that the loves are all of one family, and a soul alive with enthusiastic feeling offers a quarry easily run to ground.

"Were I not afraid, my handsome friend, of presuming too far upon your kindness, I would permit myself to reveal a curiosity — one you would undoubtedly forgive, I am certain, being so very obliging — I would confess how eager I am to understand the sense of that which you sang just now with

such tender feeling. It speaks of love, does it not? Some enamoured soul consumed with desire to enfold in her embrace an indifferent being, a heartless one, who appears to hold her cheap, who appears incapable of understanding what her enkindled eyes speak to him, what her tender ministrations would tell him.... Hapless Sappho, musing at Leucadia's cliff! Forlorn nymph, luckless naiad, spending all her strength to crack the ice upon a mere!…"

The tone of reproach in which these things were spoken allowed Patrick to conclude — and not, he thought, presumptuously — that these unbidden fancies of Madame Putiphar's pointed quite plainly at his situation and his behaviour. Injured by an impudence so bare-faced, he met her blandishments with chilling brevity: "Madame, I give you the translation:

From Cantyre Mac-Donald passed into Ireland at the head of his own men, meaning to give succour to Tyrconel, then embroiled in war with the great O'Neal. As Mac-Donald traversed the Kilroot in the county of Antrim, Mac-Quillan, the lord of those parts, entertained him with great cordiality. War occupied Mac-Quillan just then — war against the peoples whose lands lay beyond the River Bann. It was the practice in those parts for men to despoil each other without scruple; might made right, and justice served no purpose whatsoever. Upon the day Mac-Donald took his leave to seek

out his friend Tyrconel, Mac-Quillan called together his Galloglasses[18], resolved to take satisfaction for the wrongs done him by the mighty clans along the Bann. Mac-Donald, mindful of the warm welcome Mac-Quillan had given him, thought it would ill become him to leave his host to face so dangerous an expedition alone, and placed himself at his disposal. This proposal Mac-Quillan received gladly, avowing that both he and all his line would hold themselves indebted for such kindness. United, the two chieftains fell upon the foe, forcing him to give back double all that he had wrested from Mac-Quillan. In this manner the enterprise was brought to a close, very happily for Mac-Quillan: not a man of his fell, and the two bands made their way home burdened with rich booty. With winter fast approaching, the Irish lord bade the Scottish chief make his home in the castle during the coming months, and house his troop among the settlements of the Kilroot. To this Mac-Donald gave his assent; yet the hospitality was destined to be the host's undoing. The stranger, it transpired, had dishonoured his daughter and made her his bride in secrecy, her father's approval never having been sought. The Scots' claims upon Mac-Quillan's holdings trace their origin to this very marriage. The Scots were billeted upon the tenant farmers of the Kilroot; the disposition was so ordered that every household sheltered both a Scotsman and a Galloglas. The peasantry belonging to Mac-Quillan offered to every Galloglas, as well as his food

allowance, a basin of milk. The practice led to a violent dispute betwixt one of the Scots and one of the Galloglasses. When the stranger made the same demand of the farmer, the Galloglas stepped forward in the host's behalf and retorted: 'By what right do you, you beggarly Scotsman, presume to match yourself with me or with any Galloglas in Mac-Quillan's service!' The poor peasant, anxious to rid himself of the troublesome pair, told them: 'My good fellows, I will set both doors wide; go out into the meadow and fight out your quarrel — he who comes back the winner shall receive the milk.' Death put an end to the Galloglas's part in the quarrel, and the Scotsman, returning to the farmer's cottage in perfect tranquillity, made an excellent meal. The moment the killing became known, Mac-Quillan's Galloglasses came together, their purpose being to take satisfaction for their brother's blood. They took stock of how the Scots had conducted themselves, the hazardous dominance they were establishing, and the dishonour their captain had inflicted upon Mac-Quillan in leading his daughter astray. The decision was taken: each Galloglas was to dispatch his housemate in the night, and even the captain was not to escape the reckoning. Mac-Donald's bride, though, learned of the design and apprised her husband of the danger, so that the Scottish company fled for safety to Rathlin. Thenceforward the Mac-Donalds and Mac-Quillans made war upon each other for nigh on half a century, finding resolution solely when the two factions laid

their complaints before King James the First. The King showed partiality to his fellow Scot, bestowing upon him four extensive baronies and the entirety of Mac-Quillan's possessions; yet to cloak so manifest an inequity, he assigned to Mac-Quillan the barony of Inishowen and O'Doherty's old lands — Sir John Chichester brought him word of the royal decree. Mac-Quillan found himself displeased by the verdict, and even more so by the prospect of moving all his people across the Bann and Lough Foyle — for these waters separated what had been his from what was now allotted him — and therefore agreed to a proposal from the King's messenger, Sir John Chichester, who offered his own territories in trade. Mac-Quillan relinquished his right to the barony of Inishowen for property lying nearer to hand; thenceforward the Chichesters — later elevated to the earldom of Donegal — have held that extensive domain; and Mac-Quillan, that honest chieftain, retired to holdings far beneath what had been his."

The final stanza was scarcely out of his mouth when knocking was heard at one of the doors, and Madame Putiphar learnt that supper had been laid.

She was on her feet in an instant, and seized Patrick's hand to show him the way.

"I must crave your indulgence," she said with flirtatious airs, "if I venture to stay as I am in this state of déshabillé,

but I own myself such a creature of ease that the business of dressing properly quite exceeds my energies."

Thus she took her place at table just as she had reclined upon the couch — which is to say, with nothing beneath a species of wrapper or chamber-robe of white satin that the fashionable women of the day termed a *laisse-tout-faire*[19].

I may be at fault, possibly, in setting down so shameless a word, but it captures with such precision the prevailing dissoluteness of the period. That one expression alone conveys more, does it not, and encapsulates the debased manners of the age more effectively than could ten volumes of the largest format. Such a term belongs to that class of expressions which hold locked within them a whole era's history, enduring across the ages as condemning testimonials to the period that coined them. Besides, this expression bears its origins manifestly upon its face, and numbers not among those calculated to inflict agonies upon the lexicographers of future generations — upon the Pierre Borels[20] and Ménages[21] still unborn.

One could hardly say whether the second apartment, whither they now went to sup, was properly a dining-room, a boudoir, a salon, or a sleeping-chamber. To what end had it been designed? One could scarcely tell. Furniture of all varieties crowded the space: a bed stood in an alcove, a modest bookcase occupied one corner, and Patrick spent a

moment surveying the latter with idle curiosity while Madame Putiphar busied herself with certain arrangements. Large sophas ranged themselves entirely round the walls, taking up nearly all the flooring and permitting only the narrowest circulation about the table. Should a person, rocking upon his seat or tottering upon his feet — perhaps rendered unsteady by a trifle too much wine — chance to topple over, he could meet with nothing but the most agreeable of tumbles.

Patrick had supposed the supper would include a considerable party; discovering himself enclosed in this enigmatic chamber, alone with her in intimate colloquy, he commenced to entertain in earnest — his natural diffidence having hitherto forestalled the notion — that Madame Putiphar nursed designs upon his person, and that he stood entrapped in a romantic intrigue.

A tightness seized his heart, disgust invaded his thoughts as he recognised this brazen manœuvre to circumvent a man's defences and place him in a situation from which he could not escape. He saw then, with perfect clarity, the wholly compromising and menacing nature of his circumstances. Bitterly did he reproach himself for having consented to attend. To retire was not to be thought of: how could he manage it? Not a door could be seen — they were all disguised beneath tapestries; whither should he go? He had no knowledge of the house's arrangement or its environs.

Moreover, would those in her service let him take flight? His thoughts ran through countless tales of amorous intrigue gone dark and dangerous; besides which, to flee would offer no protection from the lady's vengeful displeasure. Seeing himself wholly in her power, he submitted to necessity, making up his mind to rely upon such inspiration as the moment might afford for directing his behaviour, and he put his faith in the Almighty's care.

Madame Putiphar was possessed that evening of a servile affability and spontaneous high spirits; any practised gallant would have pronounced her heavenly. By means of every agreeable artifice available to her, she sought to relax Patrick's anxious expression and introduce into his spirit some portion of infectious merriment.

Fortified behind soft civility and a carefully measured affability, he preserved a dignity that proved maddeningly proof against both the provocative viands with which she baited him and the strong wine she dispensed with a liberal hand. She found Patrick's unruffled bearing and self-command particularly galling, since they made it impossible to explain away his coldness as mere timidity or artlessness.

Long habituated to cajoling Pharaoh into an agreeable mood with an abundance of racy stories and dissolute escapades — he being a devotee of narratives like Schahriar[22], though narratives of a distinctly scandalous nature — she

now essayed the same technique upon Patrick. The full compass of the court came under her scrutiny: household of His Majesty, household of Her Majesty, household of the Dauphine[23], the households of Madame and of the royal daughters, household of his Grace the Duke of Orleans — thence proceeding to the clergy entire and to the whole of Paris.

By happy chance, she had the previous evening come into possession of the chronicle which that alcahueta[24] La Gourdan[25] of Rue Saint-Sauveur maintained for her benefit, detailing whatever strange or celebrated incidents took place within her abbey; the chronicle that M. de Sartines[26] likewise maintained for her, enumerating all the shocking and heinous matters coming within the purview of the Parisian police and the realm at large; together with the intelligence from her personal constabulary — individual to herself, clandestine, and no whit less diligent than the system operated by that impostor M. de Sartines.

She spared him nothing: the most diverting buffooneries, the most libidinous little tales, abominations that might summon heaven's fire upon the earth; but so far from affecting Patrick's sensibilities as they did Pharaoh's royal ones, these base recitals sickened him with revulsion and gave him real pain.

The supper thus consumed itself in these exchanges, liberally seasoned with quite shameless observations and enticements that left nothing to conjecture.

Dessert being laid, she asked Madame du Hausset — who had served them single-handedly — to bring five or six bottles of sparkling champagne.

"Five or six bottles of champagne!..." Patrick reiterated, looking bewildered; "Madame, what purpose can you have for such a quantity?"

"Come now, my lovely friend, for a big strong man such as you are! You would scarcely drink at all while we dined — you must be suffering from it?"

"The reverse is true, Madame; I have drunk beyond my needs; my custom is to maintain a very abstemious way of life."

"You'll never make me believe two bottles of champagne could befuddle you as they did the Regent[27] of blessed memory! Now then, offer up your glass — can you not feel some shame at leaving me to drink by myself?"

"Madame, you will reduce me to drunkenness — I am no hand at the bottle."

"You're not a drinking man — then what manner of man are you? What are your pleasures? A man — a young man above all, hot-blooded as youth must be — cannot lack every

form of passion. No such person walks the earth; the notion is untenable; it would be freakish! What is it, then, that consumes you! What rules you? What do you care for? What occupies you, in heaven's name! Perhaps you are a gamester?…"

"A gamester!... Madame, I have never so much as stepped inside a hazard-room."

"You don't drink, you don't gamble.... Have you a taste for the playhouse?"

"I am not bored there; but I would not term it a need."

"You are neither a gambler, nor a drinker, nor fond of the theatre... Does the ball attract you? Do you care for dancing?"

"Madame, I might consent to dance for the sake of a woman I loved, were it not that the very first thing I should ask of such a woman would be to abandon dancing altogether."

"Are you given to hunting?"

"Madame, no predatory instinct dwells in me craving indulgence. Too profound is my abiding admiration for the beasts of the forest and the birds of the air — those perfect creations, God's living glories — for me ever to make their destruction my occupation. I reckon myself as ill-fitted for felling timber as for pursuing game: beneath a linden I should

fall to musing; I should give ear to the warbling of larks, yet I could not strike at either — all destruction revolts me."

"You make yourself excessively coy, my shepherd lad; yet without possessing, I imagine, any greater thirst for blood than yourself, this hand — the very one you covered with kisses so gentle — has driven the blade into the hearts of above a thousand cornered deer at Pharaoh's hunting parties. Let us sum up what we have established: you are not a drinker, not a hunter, not a gambler, not an admirer of balls and the stage.... Great heavens! What are you, then? What wins your heart? Answer me!... Be frank!... It puts unwholesome ideas into one's head.... Can it be you possess those unspeakable proclivities?... No, more likely it is some hidden passion you lack the courage to acknowledge. Take heart! Tell me — I am merciful, I will forgive you, I will forgive whatever it may be. The thing is perfectly excusable, after all: a young man brimming with passion and vitality might easily conceive a love for a woman — one not yet devoid of certain attractions — who has relaxed her reserve in his presence, who has delighted in fostering within him what may prove too presumptuous a hope; but no, this young man has not fixed his hopes too high — he has won affection: that is the end of it. Let him know joy!... But pray speak; place your confidence in me, tell me once and for all what this consuming feeling is?..."

"I am in love...."

"With whom?"

"I love women."

"Women? Well, that is a relief!... Women?... but that tells me nothing. Womankind comprises a universe entire — do you possess no province of your own within it?"

"Madame, if you will permit me — there is one who fills my heart completely, and will fill it evermore."

"Is she fair?"

"Most fair!"

"Of noble birth and possessed of fortune?"

"Of noble birth and blessed with riches."

"Is she still youthful?"

"Exceedingly youthful."

"What an artful flatterer you are, Patrick! Well then, that piece of gallantry is certainly worth champagne; come along, hand me your glass. Good Lord! What sort of ring have you got there? What an archaic trinket! Wherever did you discover such a thing? My word! It looks like something fished from inside a shark!"

Whilst making these remarks, Madame Putiphar stood up from the table, went to rifle through a box of Chinese lacquerwork, and came back to where Patrick sat.

"Give me your hand," said she; "let me rid you of that ludicrous ring and put this finer one in its place, far more befitting a man like you."

"Madame, only a moment ago, did I not tell you that among women there was one I called friend?"

"So you did."

"Young, beautiful, of noble blood?"

"Yes."

"So, Madame, this woman of whom I speak...."

"What! What of her?..."

"I beg your pardon! Am I obliged to state it plainly, Madame?... Very well, this woman is no marquise."

"Not a marquise!"

"And Deborah is her name!"

"Deborah!... Patrick! Oh, how heartless you are!"

"This ring you would have stripped from me is the symbol of our pledge; it was given to her by her grandfather in his final moments. Deborah cherished this pledge no less than her own life; she has placed both in my keeping. By

night, under the vault of heaven, before God and nature as my witnesses, I accepted everything — the woman and her pledge; and I made an oath you would not wish to see me forswear."

"Years ago, a young girl gave you this trifle — well and good; it matters to you, keep it by all means; but why should that signify! Is it any impediment to my being allowed, now, in my turn, to give you this precious ring? Come, come — both will fit comfortably enough."

"Madame, I cannot do it; I know not how to love twice."

"Maintain one love only, and make of it two shares."

"Madame, the love that is mine permits no division."

"Who said anything about love? Take the ring, nothing more."

"Madame, a ring is a pledge of union."

"Indeed, that is the very reason."

"It is a solemn promise."

"Indeed, that is my very purpose."

"Both have been given, Madame. A woman exists, I say again, to whom I have sworn undying love; persist no further — your importunities would serve no purpose."

"Do you understand you are insulting me, young man? Who talks to you of love? Who seeks love from you? Fool!

You wrong me grievously, you hear me? You wrong me in two ways — through refusing this ring and through imputing to me designs that fill me with mortification. You will take your leave this instant, Monsieur! But what a wretched affair this is! Who put it into your head that I had designs upon you, unhappy wretch?… I! Have designs upon you! Stoop so low, disgrace myself so completely!... Presently one shall be unable to offer a beggar charity without his thinking one aims to buy his heart! You will take yourself off, Monsieur. D'Hausset! D'Hausset! Here! Have my men come up — throw this fellow out at once! I think I had taken leave of my wits!... Some wretched English nobody, a trifling musketeer, a man of no importance whatever, emerging from God alone knows where, on whom I poured forth my generosity, whom I raised almost to equality with myself, whom I meant to preserve from ruin!... For I desired to save you, miserable creature! For your ignominy stands not yet fully realised! Whence came such attachment and faith on my part? Everything was known to me. I wilfully deceived myself about you. Coward, so you make it your business to murder and outrage women! An assassin is what you are! Your effigy probably swings still upon the Tralee gibbet. Bow down that disgraceful head of yours, wretched fugitive from justice!"

"Fugitive from justice!... True enough, Madame — I am as wretched as I am righteous. Fugitive from justice!… Yet

does that word find no echo in your soul? Does it stir no recollections in you, and does it not enjoin upon you some measure of mercy? Can you have forgotten, Mademoiselle Poisson, Madame Lenormand? Can you not recall your father the victualler of the Invalides, who, laden with charges of larceny and peculation, fled none knows whither to avoid the stroke of the law? Seeing you know my history so perfectly, I know his equally well, and yours besides: you know I stand guiltless, and I know he does not...."

"Good God! Good heavens! Is nobody going to rid me of this scoundrel! Must I yank at every bell-pull until they snap! Ah! Here you are at last — make haste! In with you, and remove this man from my presence."

Just then four hulking ruffians in servants' dress emerged at one of the doorways.

"Stop! Stop there, my friends! Easy now — I have one thing more to tell Madame, if you'll be so good," Patrick called out; and, plucking from the shelves a volume of the *New Heloise*[28], he flipped through some pages and went on: "These words I mean to speak are not mine — they are the citizen of Geneva's; listen: *The woman wed to a collier is worthier of esteem than any kept woman of a king.*"

"Heavens! Heavens above! Is this man never to be ejected!…"

The four footmen thereupon came forward to take hold of him.

"Stand where you are, my fine servants — come no closer! I entered as one entitled to the honours of war, and as such I shall take my leave! Stand off — whoever comes near me first, I'll run him through! Very well, lackeys, tapers if you please! Light my way — direct me out — I come after you."

[1] The Grand Trianon is a small French Baroque château tucked into the northwestern corner of the Versailles estate, built by Jules Hardouin-Mansart between 1687 and 1688 at Louis XIV's command — a retreat from the crushing ceremonial weight of the main palace, faced in red Languedoc marble and deliberately kept free of the gilding and heavy ornament that defined Versailles itself. It replaced an earlier, whimsical structure faced in porcelain tiles that had simply fallen apart in the weather. Successive monarchs left it largely untouched: Louis XV gave it to his queen, Louis XVI's wife preferred the Petit Trianon next door, and Napoleon furnished it in Empire style for his second empress. Its later history has a certain irony: a building conceived as an escape from protocol became, in 1920, the place where the Treaty of Trianon was signed — an event that stripped Hungary of two-thirds of its territory and left a wound in Hungarian national memory that has never entirely healed.

[2] François Boucher (1703–1770), French painter, draughtsman, and etcher, the foremost decorative artist of the reign of Louis XV. His work epitomised the Rococo style in its most voluptuous and ornamental expression: mythological

pastorals, sensuous nudes, and idyllic landscapes rendered in a palette of pinks, blues, and creams. He served as Premier Peintre du Roi and was a favourite of Madame de Pompadour, for whom he executed numerous portraits and decorative schemes.

[3] Francesco Borromini (1599–1667), Italian architect, one of the founding masters of Roman Baroque architecture. His buildings — most notably San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane and Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza — are renowned for their restless, undulating surfaces, complex geometries, and rejection of classical regularity, earning him a reputation as the supreme exponent of the "writhing line" in architectural design.

[4] The Abbé Claude-Henri de Fusée de Voisenon (1708–1775), French clergyman and man of letters, renowned less for his pastoral duties than for his witty, frivolous literary productions — light comedies, fairy tales, and gallant verses — which made him a fixture of Parisian salon society. His work epitomised the elegant triviality that Borel's juxtaposition with Sophocles is designed to satirise.

[5] Jean-Joseph Vadé (1720–1757), French dramatist and songwriter, creator of the *genre poissard* — a form of comic entertainment that reproduced, with deliberate coarseness, the language and manners of the Parisian market-women and lower classes. His pairing with Theocritus — the refined Sicilian father of pastoral poetry — points up the distance between classical idealisation and vulgar realism.

[6] *Curlicues* are decorative twists, spirals, or curls used in design, architecture, or handwriting. Think of the fancy swirls at the end of a signature, the scrolls on a wrought-iron fence, or the ornamental carvings in wooden furniture.

[7] A guéridon is a small, mobile French side table or stand, originally designed in the 17th century to hold candelabras or vases.

[8] The Manufacture de Sèvres grew out of a porcelain workshop founded at Vincennes in 1740 under the patronage of Queen Marie Leszczyńska, before Madame de Pompadour took it under her wing, moved it to Sèvres in 1756, and effectively ran it as her personal instrument of taste. The crown bought it in 1759, and under royal ownership it produced the finest porcelain in France — soft, luminous, and unmistakable — setting the standard against which all European rivals measured themselves. Napoleon put his stamp on it in Empire style, subsequent regimes left their own marks, and the factory continues to operate to this day, still producing both reproductions of its historic pieces and contemporary works. Like the Grand Trianon, it has a certain irony in its later history: a place synonymous with the delicate pleasures of the ancien régime lent its name in 1920 to the Treaty of Sèvres — the brutal dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire.

[9] Guilloché is a decorative technique in which intricate, precisely repetitive patterns are mechanically engraved into a surface — metal, ivory, wood — using an engine-turning

lathe. The result is a mesmerising web of interlocking geometric lines, finer and more regular than any hand could achieve. The technique has ancient roots in architecture and ornament, visible in Greek, Roman and medieval stonework, but its modern form was refined in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and became particularly associated with luxury metalwork — watch cases, snuffboxes, and the like. Its most celebrated practitioner was Fabergé, who laid translucent enamel over guilloché gold to produce the luminous, shimmering surfaces of his famous eggs. The word itself is French, reputedly derived from one Guillot, a shadowy engineer to whom the invention of the turning machine is attributed — though lexicographers have long been suspicious that he ever existed at all.

[10] Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1707–1777), known as Crébillon fils to distinguish him from his father the tragedian. His novels — most notably *Le Sopha* (1742) and *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit* (1736) — employed Oriental settings as transparent veils for depicting the libertine intrigues of Parisian high society, blending Eastern exoticism with French psychological analysis in a manner that became one of the defining literary modes of the age.

[11] Antoine Galland (1646–1715), French orientalist and antiquary, whose translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* (Les Mille et une nuits, 1704–1717) introduced the tales of Scheherazade to European readers and is widely credited with

igniting the vogue for Orientalism that pervaded eighteenth-century French arts, literature, and decorative design.

[12] In Islamic belief, houris (or *hoor al-ayn*) are heavenly beings of profound beauty and purity. The term roughly translates to "pure companions with most beautiful eyes". They are described in the Quran as eternal companions or spouses for the faithful in Paradise.

[13] Claude-Joseph Dorat (1734–1780), French poet and dramatist, a prolific purveyor of graceful, amorous verse — epistles, fables, and light comedies — that embodied the mannered gallantry of the late *ancien régime*. His reputation rested entirely on elegance of expression rather than depth of thought, making him the quintessential versifier of fashionable society.

[14] Louis François Armand de Vignerot du Plessis, duc de Richelieu (1696–1788), great-nephew of the Cardinal, Marshal of France, and legendary libertine. His amorous conquests — real and reputed — became the stuff of salon legend, and he was widely regarded as the supreme exemplar of aristocratic gallantry in its most unscrupulous form. His military career, though distinguished (notably at Fontenoy), was perpetually overshadowed by his reputation as a seducer.

[15] Edward Young (1683–1765), English poet, author of The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, & Immortality (1742–1745), the melancholy philosophical poem Patrick was reading in an earlier chapter. Pierre Terrail,

seigneur de Bayard (c. 1473–1524), French knight celebrated as *le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* — the knight without fear and beyond reproach — the very model of chivalric honour, loyalty, and martial virtue. Patrick's pairing of the two — a poet of death and a paragon of honour — against Putiphar's Dorat and Richelieu neatly defines the gulf between their moral worlds.

[16] A reference to Psalm 137:4 from the Hebrew Bible. The psalm laments the Babylonian captivity of the Israelites, who, when asked by their captors to sing the songs of Zion, respond: "How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?"

[17] An allusion to the Peasant of the Danube (Le Paysan du Danube), one of La Fontaine's Fables (Book XI, Fable 7), in which a rough, uncouth peasant from the banks of the Danube appears before the Roman Senate and delivers, in plain and unadorned language, a devastating indictment of Roman imperial tyranny. The fable became proverbial in French for the figure of a seemingly simple, rustic person who confounds the sophisticated and powerful with the force of unvarnished truth. Patrick's self-deprecating use of the phrase signals that he knows exactly the role he is playing.

[18] Galloglasses (from the Irish gallóglach, meaning "foreign warrior"): elite mercenary soldiers of Scottish-Gaelic origin who served Irish chieftains from the thirteenth century onward. Typically armed with massive two-handed axes or claymores, they formed the heavily armoured backbone of

many Irish armies and were renowned for their ferocity and discipline in battle.

[19] *Laisse-tout-faire*: the literal sense — "let everything be done" — reveals the shameless innuendo embedded in this fashionable term for a lady's negligée. The garment's name advertised its function: to offer no impediment to seduction, being designed for ready removal and requiring no elaborate fastenings.

[20] Pierre Borel (c. 1620–1671), French physician, antiquary, and lexicographer, author of the *Trésor de recherches et antiquitez gauloises et françoises* (1655), a pioneering dictionary of archaic and obscure French words. No relation to the author of the present novel, though the shared surname lends the passage an additional layer of self-referential wit.

[21] Gilles Ménage (1613–1692), French grammarian, philologist, and etymologist, author of the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue françoise* (1650) and the *Origini della lingua* (1669). A formidable scholar and celebrated conversationalist, he devoted his career to tracing the origins and histories of words, making him the natural companion to Pierre Borel in any reference to the labours of lexicography.

[22] Schahriar (also Shahryar): the legendary king in the *Thousand and One Nights*, who, having discovered his wife's infidelity, resolves to marry a new bride each night and have her executed at dawn. It is to forestall this fate that Scheherazade begins her famous cycle of stories, each left unfinished at

daybreak to ensure her survival. The comparison implies that Pharaoh, like Schahriar, requires nightly entertainment to keep his attention — though in his case the tales are scandalous rather than marvellous.

[23] Dauphine is the female form of the particular French feudal (comital or princely) title of *Dauphin* (also Anglicised as *Dolphin*), applied to the wife of a Dauphin (usually in the sense of heir to the French royal throne).

[24] Alcahueta: a Spanish term for a woman who mediates or facilitates romantic encounters, often secret or illicit ones — a procuress or go-between.

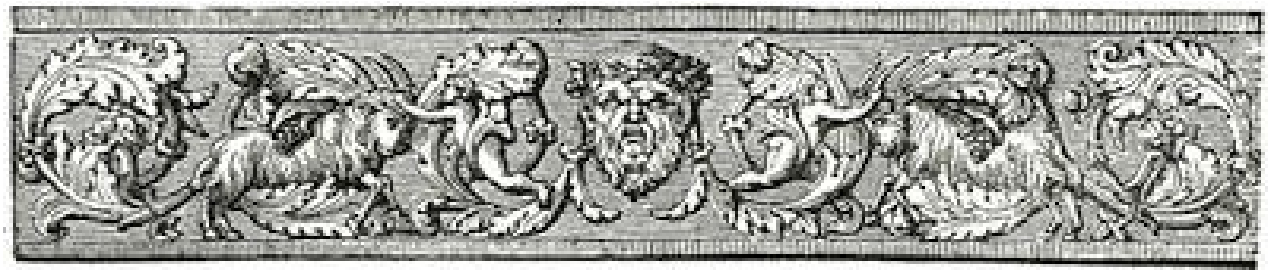
[25] Marguerite Gourdan, née Stock (c. 1730–1783), the most notorious brothel-keeper in eighteenth-century Paris. Her establishment in the Rue Saint-Sauveur was the most exclusive of its kind, catering to the aristocracy, the clergy, and the highest reaches of the court. The ironic term "abbey" for her premises was common parlance of the period.

[26] Antoine Raymond Jean Gualbert Gabriel de Sartine, comte d'Alby (1729–1801), Lieutenant General of Police of Paris from 1759 to 1774 under Louis XV, and subsequently Secretary of State for the Navy under Louis XVI. His police apparatus was renowned for its thoroughness and its network of spies and informers, which kept him apprised of every scandal and intrigue in the capital.

[27] Philippe II, Duke of Orléans (1674–1723), Regent of France during the minority of Louis XV from 1715 to 1723.

His regency was synonymous with libertine excess: his notorious suppers at the Palais-Royal, fuelled by prodigious quantities of champagne, became legendary emblems of aristocratic dissipation.

[28] *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), the epistolary novel by Jean-Jacques Rousseau — "the citizen of Geneva" — which became one of the most widely read and influential works of the eighteenth century. Its passionate defence of natural feeling, moral virtue, and the dignity of simple domestic life against the corruptions of aristocratic society made it a touchstone for the age's debates about sincerity, class, and the rights of the heart.



XXVII.

On his way out, Patrick paused to make an elaborate bow in Madame Putiphar's direction.

Her breast heaving with rage, her look haggard and unseeing, she collapsed against a sopha and there she stayed for no little time in cheerless, unmoving silence.

Then of a sudden the force of will returned to her, and like a creature half-mad she rushed to sit down at her desk; but so intense was her discomposure that the quill fluttered in her hand with all the agitation of wind-blown plumage. Exasperated beyond endurance, she threw the thing down and rang for her chambermaid.

"Du Hausset! There — sit down," said she. "Well then, take up your pen and write at my direction, if you please."

For the attention of M. le Marquis de Gave de Villepastour.

Marquis,

You had the right of it. That wretched Mr Fitz-Whyte is an imbecile, a savage, a blackguard — in short, all that you suspected.… You abandoned him to my discretion — I send him back to you. I had forbidden you to remove him from your ranks; I now direct that he be turned out without delay and in the most dishonourable fashion.

Thus do we decree, Marquis, as befits our inclination just now.

Your servant.

"To the other business now."

To be given into the hands of M. Phélipeaux Saint-Florentin de la Vrillière.[1]

Dearest little saint,

Hasten to me the instant this is delivered. I stand in need of you, by which I mean the attentions of your obliging department. I shall need two lettres de cachet[2] *forthwith. The reprieve granted the musketeer Fitz-Harris must be set aside, and I insist upon the prompt committal of one Patrick Fitz-Whyte, likewise a musketeer, to the dungeons.*

Lose no time, my sweet — for all this we shall need to put our heads together.

Your faithful friend.

"There, give me the thing — I will sign directly. Have them fastened up this instant and given over to my runner, that by morning he shall be ready to take them where they belong."

This business dispatched, a certain lightness came over her. She felt now the peculiar contentment that succeeds an act of vengeance: a gratification most pleasant to one who has been wronged, but fierce in its nature.

An affliction unto herself, bitterly let down as a person is who waits in vain at some appointed meeting; bewildered as one becomes when a plot long and carefully laid comes to nothing at the very hour it was to unfold, leaving idle hours that must somehow be endured; in a mood fit for murder and feeling no fatigue, she betook herself to bed, though she tasted no rest — nor did she wish for any.

Upon the blazing furnace of her fevered breast her loathing roiled in her heart like some immense brazen pot set over flame!

When one is spiteful, one delights in swelling one's anguish to yet greater proportions; the hurt one bears and the

hurt one deals oneself become a kind of gratification; there is a grim joy in gnawing upon one's restraints — indeed, one wishes to gnaw for hours together; we court wakefulness; within it thought works and bubbles freely, and this bubbling becomes a headlong rush of ideas down which we permit ourselves to be swept, much as an unrigged and oarless craft is swept along.

In this manner did she spend an entire night, though she had appointed that very night for quite another sort of entertainment.

Quien cuenta sin huésped, cuenta dos.[3]

[1] Louis Phélypeaux, comte de Saint-Florentin, later duc de la Vrillière (1705–1777), French Secretary of State who held the portfolio for the Maison du Roi — the department responsible, among other things, for the issuance of *lettres de cachet*. His "obliging department" was the administrative machinery through which arbitrary imprisonment was effected, and his compliant nature made him a willing instrument of royal and courtly vengeance alike.

[2] A *lettre de cachet* was a sealed royal order, signed by the king and countersigned by a minister, authorising the imprisonment of a named individual without trial, charge, or legal recourse. Under the *ancien régime* it served as an instrument of both political repression and private settling of scores — families used them to confine wayward relatives, and courtiers to silence enemies. The practice became one of the most reviled symbols of monarchical despotism and was abolished in 1790 during the Revolution.

[3] A Spanish proverb: "He who reckons without his host must reckon twice" — that is, one who makes plans without consulting the person most essential to them will find those plans go awry. Madame Putiphar had reserved this night for

pleasures involving Patrick, but counted without his cooperation.

XXVIII.

On his side, Patrick endured the night in no small agitation, though of a source and character altogether different.

Thrust forth so harshly from Trianon's gates, he chose not to return to the town, where at that late hour no hospitable door would have stood open to him, but rather accepted with genuine contentment the notion of wandering abroad until the coming of day.

Setting off along whatever road chance offered, he discovered himself, once he had walked a little way, at the skirts of a wood, and entered it with that reverent shudder which unfailingly grips the dreamer's soul upon crossing into places deep and dim and still; eventually he settled himself beneath a thickly-leaved elm, its boughs bending earthward to

create a verdant bower overhanging the precipitous edge of a pool.

Swallowed up in darkness under the leafy shelter, he derived quiet joy from the sight of hares, does, and fawns that wandered past, frisking and grazing near him in tranquil fearlessness; so might Aesop have sat, or Phaedrus, or La Fontaine — as they are depicted in those charming frontispieces to fable-books, with the beasts gathered familiarly round them.

But when nothing served to scatter his reflections — no flickering sprite dancing on the water, no play of moonbeams amongst the foliage, no companionship of deer or hare, no call of a nocturnal songster — then a great sadness descended upon him.

Life's road stretched before him still two-thirds unwalked, yet already he drew rein, a worn wayfarer glancing back to reckon up the miles behind him. He took stock of his inner resources, seeking to know whether sufficient fortitude remained to carry him through his bitter wandering to the end.

Every misery he had endured, every anguish, every hardship, every stroke of ill-fate came crowding back upon his remembrance in a great surging throng. He tried to balance them with whatever gladness and felicity had been his,

but it was useless, so grossly unequal were the burdens on either side.

The past stretched behind him full of horror; the anguished present held out no prospect of better things to come.

"Great God!" he exclaimed in the extremity of his wretchedness, "would that you had fashioned me after the pattern of those they name villains! I should not be here bewailing my lot in loneliness — no, I should be revelling in voluptuous pleasure in the embrace of a queen of sorts; and come tomorrow, rather than bent double under her wrath as no doubt I shall be, rather than perhaps watching the hatch of a cell close over me again, I should be racing up the steps of preferment two and three at a time. Could you not, my God, grant me happiness without demanding I transform my very heart? What can you be holding in store for me hereafter, O God, that you visit such cruelty upon me here?"

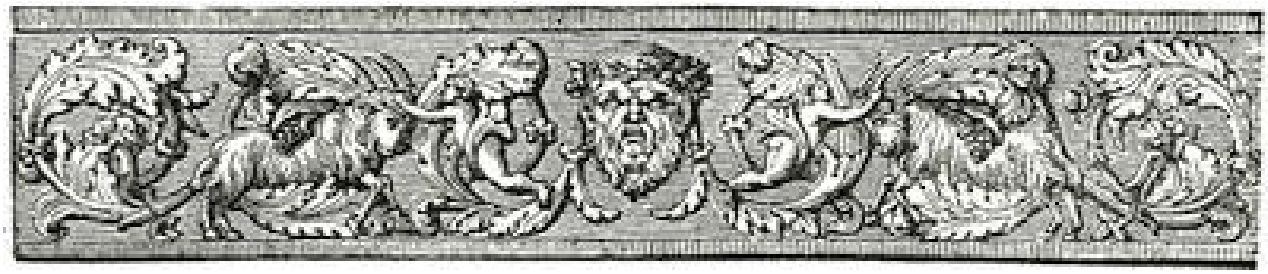
When at last his tears were exhausted, he found what comfort he could in that refuge to which every miserable creature resorts, holding up his own distress against the mirror of horrors more frightful still. Above all, his present affliction appeared tolerably light whenever he bethought himself of King Lear, that kindly ancient driven by his inhuman daughters from his palace into the teeth of a howling storm, staggering through the fields half-naked and

frozen, his aged head exposed and his hoary locks drenched by the pitiless rain.

Directly the day began to break he made his way back into Versailles, where upon the parade-ground he glimpsed Madame Putiphar's messenger riding out post-haste on some business.

Once returned to his quarters, he gave what directions were necessary to his batman and dropped onto his pallet, eager for whatever rest he might obtain.

The rest he found was short-lived, the manner of its ending disagreeable in the extreme: acting on the captain's orders and vouchsafing no word of explanation, they burst in to seize him and convey him straightaway to a locked cell where none might reach him.



XXIX.

On the morrow, near noon, he heard from the bottom of his gaol the trumpets sounding a chamade[1] thrice; the unusual summons struck him with great perplexity, and he was still turning the matter over in his mind when the grille of his cell was thrown open. They bade him come out and go up to his quarters, that he might array himself in the habit and trappings of full military dress.

His preparations complete, the officer and his two armed escorts — muskets at the ready — led him forth into the court of honour.

Judge of his stupefaction when he perceived the Company standing to arms, stationed along every side and making up a squared enclosure, left vacant in the middle!

At his approach the trumpets blared afresh, and he was brought forward into that empty middle space, where

mounted upon their steeds were the captain-colonel and all his suite.

Not until that instant did he perceive what was going to occur, and that all this theatre had been got up for his sake.

The thought revolted his very soul; he swept the assembly with a look of proud disdain, made a defiant motion as if to challenge them all to battle, and reached for his sword; yet in that instant a glacial cold flooded his veins, and a shuddering that all could witness took possession of him. Cold perspiration, such as bedews the dying, glistened on his blanched visage, he wavered where he stood, his hearing became a tumult of droning and whistling, his eyes lost all their power, his very spirit was extinguished.

It was then that he was compelled to kneel down.

M. de Villepastour gave orders to the lieutenant whose duty it was to make the report to deliver the decree of expulsion whereby Patrick Fitz-Whyte was to be driven from the Musketeers of the Guard, being a man marked with infamy by the law, adjudged guilty of murder and executed by effigy upon Irish soil. Whilst this judgement was being delivered, consciousness and sensation having come back to him, he buried his face within his hands. Thick tears trickled past his fingers, and wrenching sobs broke forth from his labouring chest.

"My God! My God!" came his murmur, like that of the former night among the forest shadows, "what have you in store for me in the life to come, that you should render this one so pitiless!"

The sentence having been read, the lieutenant who had proclaimed it stepped forward to where Patrick knelt and instructed him to resume his feet in order that the ritual of his cashiering might proceed.

First came the removal, drawn down past his feet, of sabre, braided cords and baldric; thereafter his facings and his coat-revers were rent away, and thereafter still, one after another, his buttons graven with the royal emblems. His coat was then taken from him; then his locks were cut away entirely, just as might be done to a wretch awaiting the scaffold, and over his nakedness they drew a peasant's blouse and a cowl made of the coarsest fabric.

The trumpeters sent their jeering flourishes pealing across the courtyard.

Thereupon M. de Villepastour came towards him, and sitting high upon his horse struck him three times across the small of the back with the broadside of his sword, shouting three times over: "Get you gone — be banished!"

[1] *Chamade*: a military trumpet or drum signal, historically sounded to announce a parley, a surrender, or a formal summons. Here it serves as the opening note of a ceremonial degradation — its solemn, ritualistic character making the humiliation that follows all the more deliberate and theatrical.

XXX.

Patrick, mortified at finding himself thus abroad in so base a garb, made all haste to return to the Hôtel Saint-Papoul.

"Can you recognise me?" he said, bursting in upon Deborah, who stood frozen in appalled bewilderment. "Look upon me — see to what your husband has been reduced by the hands of men! Is he degraded enough for them, do you think? Befouled enough, say?"

He could say nothing more, his senses fled him, and he fell.

"Good heavens! What can have come to pass, my dear good man? Patrick, speak! What is wrong? What have the scoundrels done to you? Who put you into this fool's cap and this wretched sack? Talk to me, I beg you — speak, my dear one!"

"Dear one, you say! Unhappy creature! Take care not to call me by that name, which I am no longer fit to bear; I carry too heavy a burden of shame! Ignominy may be taken as a fever is taken — go from me, and keep yourself distant from me always! You, so high-minded and unstained; I, so low and dishonoured; I, tainted myself and tainting all I touch — we two may not continue linked as one. Come, let us put asunder what fortune has joined — there is still time for it: may your life be crowned with joy! Mine shall be whatsoever Providence ordains! Did I not say to you before, long since, that you should have nothing more to do with me; I carry disaster in my wake, can you not see it! Let me go on my way alone, hurtling from one black pit to the next; do not yoke your life — which might be happiness itself were I not in it — to mine, which must be nothing but misery and horror straight through to the end."

"Patrick, you must not despair — gather your spirits. Show me some gentleness; speak no more such cruel words as hurt me so terribly — words which, perhaps, I might more justly claim the right to speak than you can. Look you, if disaster flows from one of us to the other, I am hardly so deceived as not to feel the truth of it — that I am the guilty one: I bring you nothing but hurt; I am the beginning and the end of all your woes; it is I who am your curse! Were it not for me, you would be there still, serene and untroubled, by the

waters of Lough Leane, close by that gentle mother of yours, now grown old, who must be weeping still for her lost son! And tell me, what manner of love would that be which flickered out the moment good fortune deserted the one who was cherished? You may credit me when I say that love which fails when tested by adversity is no true love at all. You cannot doubt that my love for you is unshakeable; it is forged to endure calamity; do not push it from you. I tell you plainly, there is no torment with which God may afflict His creatures that could ever compel me to leave you. If unhappiness is to be your lot, if your days are to be gnawed eternally by afflictions, as you insist — a thing I shrink from crediting, a thing that surely cannot come to pass — then suffer me to abide with you. The Almighty has set me at your side for this very purpose: to dry the tears from your eyes, to hold you up when you are cast down, to make your load of woe lighter by taking part of it upon myself. Do not send me away! To suffer alone is to suffer doubly. A helpmate is like unto a vessel bestowed by the Almighty upon man, wherein he may empty all the excess of his sorrows."

"Heavenly Father," cried Patrick again and again, beating his brow, "what wickedness is mine! Deal with me harshly — spare me not! The highest and loveliest gift within your power to bestow on man you have given me; you sent me one of your very Angels; and yet I dared to reproach you, to utter

impieties against you! Mercy, mercy — never again will I transgress! Let it be as you ordain — may your blessed designs be accomplished; I yield to them. Whatever trials you send me hereafter, you shall find me reconciled to your judgment, morning, noon, and night."

"Hear me, Patrick; when all is considered, it may be that I do wrong in pressing my presence on you, in wishing to attach myself to your fortunes. If it could be shown to me that your joy depended upon my going away, then away I would go — with a heavy heart, certainly, but making no complaint of it. Hear me now — if such is your desire, you shall be free of me, you may put me from your thoughts when happiness and good fortune smile upon you; but this one condition I make: that whenever wretchedness befalls you, you will fly back into my embrace, into the embrace of your truest friend; I will give you solace."

"But the whole sum of my happiness, every drop of pleasure in my life, has no other source than you, noble soul! Since you will go so far as to destroy yourself for my sake, then stay, I beg you, stay near me; do not forsake me; take no notice of the things I tell you; when I am in torment, you must understand, I am a raving lunatic! I say these things because I would welcome death; feeling keenly that you and you only are the thread that tethers me to this life; feeling

keenly that of all who walk the earth, you only, my beloved friend, do not weary the very depths of my being."

"Were it in your power, by means of some generous sacrifice which I both condemn and push aside, to force a parting between us, to tear asunder what binds our fates together, there is but one favour I should have sought — one only, and on bended knee: leave to come to you from time to time and bring into your arms the living proof of our devotion, the child growing inside me."

"Heaven and earth! What is it you tell me... Deborah?"

"I cannot mistake it any further, Patrick — I am with child!"

"Ah! God be thanked, Deborah, God be thanked! who fills my heart with such delight; blessed be He who grants me a son!" cried Patrick, having in one swift moment travelled from tearful despair to the most delirious joy imaginable. He pulled off the vile sack he wore and rent it to shreds, grinding it under his heel; he launched himself into Debby's arms, wound his arms around her neck, squeezed her tightly to his breast, covered her brow with kisses, fell down to kiss her feet.

"Ah! I dared not think, my darling Debby, that so great a joy was destined to be mine. Lunatic that I was! Did God ever withhold from me what I truly needed! Was it not from His

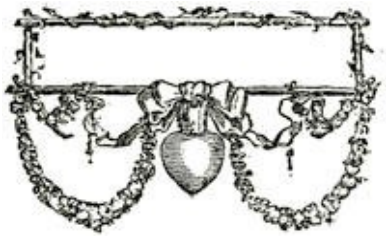
hand that I received a helpmate and a passionate love; a helpmate whom the world conspired to wrench away from me; a love which they have done their utmost to frustrate and envenom? I perceive it now with perfect clarity — from God flows every sweet and blessed thing; from the world flows every torment and affliction. There lies the sum of our strife, the measure of our fatigue, mark me well — holding fast against human encroachment whatever blessings Providence has seen fit to give us. Ah! This blessing I shall know better how to defend — they shall not take it from me! Besides, what has the world to do with the bond between father and child: we will secrete him away, we will steal him from prying eyes as men hide their riches underground; we will nurture him in secrecy and defended against all contamination. Lord above! Lord above! I am the happiest man alive! But you, my Debby — are you happy too?"

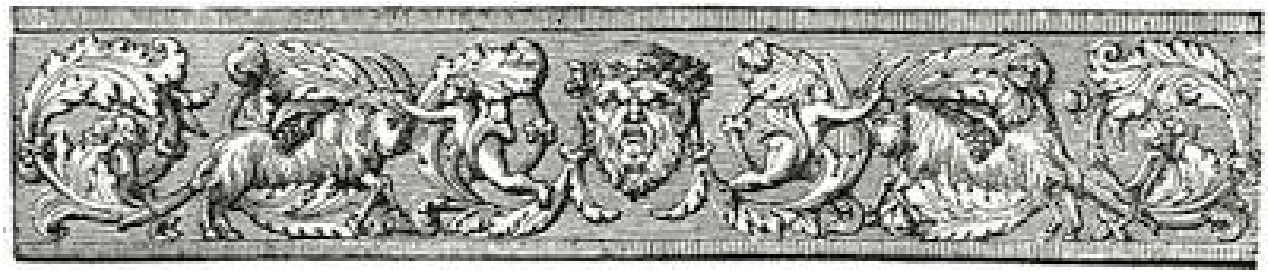
"Both joyful and proud, Patrick!"

"Do you understand, I wonder, Deborah, just how deep and wide my joy runs? You may think me flighty, even silly; but know this, the wish nearest my heart has just been answered, the most cherished of all my dreams is becoming real; what I wished for above all things, what I desired without ceasing, was to hold a son of my own while yet in the bloom of life. Oh! What good would it do me to be made a parent in the twilight of my days, to have sons who would

know nothing of me save that I was tedious and worn out, who would be coming into the world as I was departing it; who would find themselves bereft of me exactly when they stood in greatest need of my loving solicitude; sons whose maturity I would never live to see, whose progress in the world I could not watch, whom I could not be there to steady when adversity laid them low. I do not wish for sons who quake when I speak sternly, who feel sorry for the whiteness of my hair, who dampen down their spirits out of deference to my age. It is a comrade I desire, a fellow traveller through my days who will be devoted to me and remain at my side wherever I go; who will be as fresh in years as I feel myself to be, I as fiery as he is; who enters into my sport, my toil, my fancies, my troubles, my joys, and my dissipations too; one, finally, who will have no hidden corners in his heart that I cannot enter, just as I shall have none closed to him. Can you see now why this means so much to me? Imagine — I shall be forty when he stands at twenty. How I thank you, Heavenly Father! How I thank you! You find me well pleased. This will make amends for so much suffering. He will be handsome in your image, Deborah; handsome with the same loveliness that lives in your heart! The pair of you will play side by side; he will be like a living plaything for you; all three of us will romp and play, with never a cross word between us. And if it should be God's pleasure that we have a daughter instead, you will have a friend in her, a devoted companion; I

shall be happy either way; Kentigerne we shall name her, or else Kildare if that suits better."





XXXI.

Dinner being over, Patrick said to Deborah: "Tell me, my dear — do you like this town? Are you happy in this country? Have you any regrets for Ireland?"

"No regret for Ireland, my dear — none. But the skies of Cockermouth Castle I do regret, and its air, its trees, its rugged stones; the dashing through woodland and up mountainside; our leisurely turns about the Lake of Killarney; those sunsets we watched from the East Tower, and beyond everything, those nights we knew in the park and sheltered beneath the Torrent's Hollow Willow. Mine is but the common regret felt whenever one exchanges country for city; I long for nothing more than what I should have longed for just as keenly in Dublin, had I forsaken our wild mountains of Kerry to make that place my home.

"City life is constricting; these little boxes, these cages where one grows pale in captivity, squeeze and strap the soul as tight as any corset: our spirits are bounded by floor above and floor below, by four enclosing walls; our vision, powerless to pierce through, shatters and rebounds inward upon ourselves; we acquire the habit of being pleased with ourselves, of being satisfied with ourselves — and thus we are reduced, we are shrivelled, we grow small and cramped. Being forever surrounded by the works of men makes us as small-minded and prosaic as those works are: we lose all memory of nature's sublime exhibitions, we forget the vast universe, we forget our fellow beings, we forget everything save our own selves and a handful of inclinations to be pleased. All of creation is reduced in our minds to a few sticks of furniture, some chairs, some tables, some beds, some rags of cloth or silk, which we come to adore with unseemly devotion, attaching ourselves to them as firmly as the oyster to its crag, over them vegetating mindlessly and crawling like some lowly lichen.

"My friend, if you ask whether I am pleased in your company, I will tell you yes, wherever we may be, in whatever place; but that I could ever be pleased with dwelling in this city, or in any city whatever — no, I feel quite certain of that now."

"Then, Deborah, should it prove needful for you to quit Paris, it would cost you no sorrow?"

"If I were leaving with you, I should do it willingly — cheerfully, even — for here my flesh grows feeble from want of occupation, and my soul remains trapped in restless confusion. And truly, what would you have me feel for this country? This earth is as alien to me as the wastes of Ukraine; I belong to it no more than an Indian does: my forebears are not buried in its soil, my children were not born upon it; not one remembrance does this soil hold for me."

"How it pleases me, dearest friend, to hear you speak thus: for the truth is, I am not safe here any longer; Paris must be left behind in the greatest hurry; as we escaped from Ireland, so we must now make our escape from France."

"Then we must be gone, we must be gone this instant, we must make our escape! This flight I accept with pleasure. Come, let us turn our backs on this unwelcoming soil; I am quite ready, Patrick; but you must tell me — what danger we face, what threat looms before us, who has marked us for exile?"

"At noon today, as you know — when I came dashing to your side in this wretched garment and fell at your feet — I had that very moment been dismissed from the Musketeers in

the most shameful manner; and then last night, the night just past, Madame Putiphar had turned me away from Trianon.

"Of late, there had been a change in Monsieur de Gave de Villepastour's disposition towards me: I had marked the shift before ever Fitz-Harris's letter came to hand. One day he showered me with kindness, the next he spoke to me harshly and handled me with savage roughness. Ultimately, there remained only hardness and cruelty in him, and he hunted me down unrelentingly with his enmity — an enmity I am at a loss to understand, for I know of nothing I did to earn it. It seemed he found some covert joy in seeing me suffer; he had the air of a man who savours some long-awaited vengeance. Yet what was this vengeance for? Had I, at any time, given this man offence? Small wonder, therefore, that he clutched with zeal and vindictive pleasure at the splendid chance that came his way to make me suffer. Had this occurred a month earlier, he would have been as assiduous in smothering these charges being whispered against me as he has been relentless in trumpeting them abroad, in manufacturing an ignominious public scene, in heaping ignominy upon my head; yet this is not all — this is not the worst of what I have to tell.

"By entreating mercy for Fitz-Harris, I had managed — flattering accomplishment, much to my credit — to recommend myself to Madame Putiphar's good graces; which is to say, I had made a conquest of her, and a profitable one

at that. In the beginning I would not believe I had succeeded so well, despite manifestations on her part that left little room for doubt; but last night every scruple of doubt departed in headlong flight, and I was left with complete and certain knowledge.

"My engagement last evening turned out to be, in plain terms, a carefully arranged seduction: a refined little supper, a meeting for two alone, a contest of amorous strategy. All had been expertly contrived with my seduction in view: it was an ambuscade from which nothing had been omitted. I am at a loss to understand how my virtue came through unharmed amidst such a profusion of pitfalls, meshes, springes, gins, mirrors, decoys, fish-traps and bird-lime. I prevailed over everything, I remained proof against everything. My refusal only excited her further: she tried to take me by force, as though I were some virtuous girl to be ravished. It was to no purpose! I stood unconquerable. Thwarted and humiliated, her ardent desire turned to ire, to choler, to absolute frenzy; she pulled the bell and had four lackeys brought up to cast me forth; but thanks to my sword, I took my leave in a decidedly more victorious fashion than she intended.

"I am fully sensible of it, yet the uprightness of my heart gave me no freedom in how I behaved — I have given Madame Putiphar one of those offences that no woman ever forgives: and how much less will she forgive it, being so

spiteful, so implacable, so bent on revenge, so utterly without compassion. It was not simply that I offended her — I challenged her in the midst of her wrath; I scoffed at her; I returned her sneers with sneers in kind. There is no doubt whatever — my destruction is determined now; I am a lost man, I am trapped beneath her malice, and her malice is always fearsome. The woman commands every lever of power, all things yield to her utterance; she need merely condescend to gesture, and what she wishes comes to pass; let her but say, 'That person annoys me,' and he is swept from the face of the earth, or from public view at the very least.

"What seals my fate most completely is that she has learned of the ruling made by my Irish judges and of my conviction. During her fit of rage, she hurled the term 'contumax[1]" at me repeatedly, and brought up the scaffold waiting at Tralee.

"How did the news come to her knowledge so quickly? Either she commands an exceptionally vigilant intelligence network, with informants perpetually alert, or more probably, Monsieur de Villepastour supplied her with the intelligence: a number of things that escaped her lips during our talk give me strong grounds for thinking so. She nursed ambitions with respect to me; no doubt she made enquiries, as anyone does when considering whether to take a young man into one's private sphere.

"Armed with this knowledge, she may — not that such niceties concern her — give her vindictiveness the outward show of righteousness; she can move against me with more audacity, even if not with harsher measures.

"Deborah, you weep!... Fear nothing, my dear, do not let terror seize you: I do not wish to blind us to the peril in which we stand; yet close and pressing though the danger be, we need not abandon hope. We must outpace the harm that is undoubtedly being plotted for us in darkness. We must quit this town without waiting, we must run: run! There is no other course open to us, but this one will not fail. We can still withdraw ourselves readily enough; the thing needs only rapid resolve and courage; both of which we command. Weep not, my dearest, do not afflict yourself so; put your confidence in God, who permits us to face this hardship; His goodness is as an ocean — we must not be ridiculous enough to think we can sound its depths with our meagre wit. What mortal has ever been vouchsafed the knowledge of His designs? How can we tell whether calamity is not mercy in disguise? What certainty have we that the most terrible thing does not precede one that is simply ill, that ill fortune does not come before good, that good does not arrive ahead of better?"

"Patrick, I am grateful for the pains you are at to comfort me, though you yourself are burdened with such heavy grief. I value the exertions you made a moment past to treat this

agonising and ruinous episode as though it were of no consequence; your real distress seeped through your feigned high spirits, and the smile you forced upon your face was as painful for me to observe as watching someone in the throes of a seizure.

"Patrick, you would deny me my tears — you would ask, is such a thing thinkable? that I show no feeling toward the disasters besetting you, disasters for which I bear the blame, for these newest misfortunes trace themselves back to me."

"You, Debby, to blame for my misfortunes! How ridiculous!"

"Yes, were it not for me, were it not for the love you think yourself bound to give me, you would have succumbed to the infatuation your good looks, your winning ways, your silver tongue had provoked so vehemently in this woman; rather than being hunted by her malice as you are now, you would be her adored young intimate; you would savour all the sensual delights, all the exquisite pleasures of a magnificent Court; you would be the most distinguished and most fêted gentleman at Versailles; beneath your feet would cluster the fawning assembly of courtiers who would come begging from your hand for the benefits your benefactress might grant. Fame, riches, rank, delights — everything would have come to you, everything would have been yours: your future would be made, your tomorrow golden! I have laid waste to all those

prospects for you! It is on my account, yet again, that you are offered up as a victim!"

"Debby, you suppose in me two different feelings: the one renders me glorious, the other quite offends me. You have judged correctly that for your sake, as you have had the kindness to sense, I would turn away the fairest woman alive, the most affluent, the most powerful, the most beneficial connection that could guarantee me the most glittering prospects; yet it is untrue — pray forgive my speaking so plainly — that in your absence I should have given myself to this Putiphar, that I should have hawked my youth to amuse her remorseful hours, sold my kisses by the ounce for silver coin, and bartered my poverty, of which I am fiercely proud, for sumptuous infamy. I admit freely that you have nurtured the goodness of my heart, that your exquisite affection has made it nobler; but I make so bold as to think that enough natural dignity dwelt within me that, even without you, even without your guiding hand, I should never have been mean-spirited and despicable."

"You are bitter towards me, Patrick.... Yet I would have you know that I esteem you as you deserve; I have not the impertinence to think myself responsible for your refined conscience, nor the presumption to imagine that, but for your connexion with me, you would have proved a man of dishonest character; but, in all modesty, was I not entitled to

believe that, standing entirely alone — free of every bond, every solemn pledge, no beloved filling your heart — caught in the terrible predicament that entrapped you, you could well have preferred to forsake the rigorous dictates of your conscience and overmaster your reluctance, rather than strike so wounding an insult at this Fredegunda[2], whose hatred, when awakened, knows no easy satisfaction. And would it have been so great a sin to have favoured pleasurable libertinage, pomp, and worldly preferment, in place of barbarous persecution? At your age, to have preferred the Court to a prison cell! Life itself to death, mayhap!

"Let your generous nature say what it may, it shall not rid me of the knowledge that I am the unique and ruinously fertile root of your every misery. Have you been thrust out shamefully from the Musketeers? Then blame only me; I am equally the author of this abominable torture; this is no wild fancy! Hear what I must tell you: there exists something which, till this moment, I had considered it right to hide from you, that I might spare the serenity of your soul and neither burden your spirit with agitation nor inflame your heart with rage; you will excuse my reticence, for it was incumbent upon me to keep silence as surely as it is incumbent upon me today to speak.

"What could have wrought the change that fell so unexpectedly upon M. de Villepastour? You could not fathom

his avidity to possess himself of Fitz-Harris's letter, his savage insistence upon discovering you guilty, upon sentencing you to dishonour, upon casting you out from his Company? How could you understand his brutality towards you, when you had been, for such a length of time, the very person he most favoured and shielded? The relish with which he punished you, the revengeful spirit that so plainly possessed him in his dealings with you — whence these arose, you could not tell? Patrick, every particle of it sprang from my person alone!... How or why or when it began, I know not; but lately he had fallen prey to animal desires and a fierce passion where I was concerned, and he gave me no peace from his disgraceful overtures...."

"Merciful God! What is this you say? He likewise — blackguard!... Merciful God, have you exhausted all your fury!..."

"Here — yes, here — there upon that very sopha, he made more than one impudent assault upon me, he forced himself upon me; but, thanks be to Providence, and to my own spirit, I overcame him, I thrust him out brimming with wounded pride and enmity, and it was you who bore the brunt of his fury, you upon whom he glutted his revenge!"

"The dastard!..."

"You must see now what prompted those shocked outcries I gave when you brought me to stand before him; you must see what drove my rage and the abuse I heaped upon that licentious wretch who set himself up as a stern judge and who made such show with you of piety and majesty.

"Now you will appreciate the readiness with which I seized upon your proposal to quit this place: could I remain unmoved by so favourable an opportunity to extricate myself from an intrigue that was growing frightful to me, that was entrapping me on every side, that made sport of my resistance and toyed with me at will? A wretched struggle it proved, one in which I risked defeat, in which I had everything at stake, whether, from noble motives, I concealed the matter from you, or whether I summoned you to my rescue. Your upright nature cannot grasp what manner of man he is, made yet more menacing by his inflexible determination; he stands among that class of iron-willed reprobates who acknowledge no sanctity save in the gratification of their passions, and upon whom entreaties, weeping, compassion, frailty, justice, or decency alike are powerless to work any effect or impose any check.

"Indeed! Indeed! Patrick, we must leave, we must fly with all haste! You have decided well; we should not stay another day in this Babylon, this corrupted Capua[3]; we have lost our

way here, we have no place among such people. Among wolves one must howl like a wolf; whoever bleats will furnish them their supper!"

"Do not fear, beloved Deborah, that my resolution will weaken; not now, when I understand that our foes are one and the same and may league together the better to destroy us; not now that I know you a mother and that my protective charge has grown twofold, now that we owe allegiance not simply to one another, but to the child whom God in His mercy sends us.

"Let us fly hence and pursue in far regions some less debauched nation, where, even if mankind there is not of finer quality, at least the wicked wield less power to harm; a land where we shall have no dread of stumbling upon fellow Irishmen, or upon Fitz-Harris himself, who would trumpet my calamity to all who would listen, brand me rebel and defaulter, and cast in my teeth the scaffold that awaited me at Tralee; where our children shall never be put to shame on account of their father, nor bear the stain of his dishonour.

"We shall do yet more: to erase all memory of whence they spring, we shall take fresh names upon ourselves and mislead them concerning the land from which their grandsires came.

"Such projects as these require power of spirit, fixity of purpose, and courage seldom found: yet God in His mercy has given us that very courage.

"If we had courage to uproot ourselves from the home of our birth, to tear ourselves away from maternal arms, from the lake-shores of Killarney, from Kerry's windswept wilderness, then we shall have courage in abundance to turn our backs upon the world, to break with all that we had hitherto known, to relinquish what we were and what we might have been, and to seek our portion of sun, soil, and human fellowship among one of those nameless peoples whom the refined world hereabouts is accustomed to calling savages.

"In ourselves, and in the majestic landscape of nature that will encircle us, we shall discover such contentment and peace as will fully compensate for whatever we have given up, whatever we have cast behind us, and we shall have done with asking society for those spurious delights by which it dulls our perception of the harm it does.

"Malice never sleeps; let us put our plan of flight into action immediately. Tomorrow, Deborah, must not catch us lingering here."

"Say the word, dearest, and I shall follow you to the ends of the world if need be."

"We must act while we may — eight has just sounded from the Abbey — I am off to the staging office; I shall reserve any places to be had, aboard whatever vehicle they have, if only it leaves with first light and takes a southerly direction. We shall proceed to Marseille, or else to Genoa, or to Leghorn; and thence we shall set sail for that part of the world which we shall have determined upon."

"Go now, Patrick, and be back directly. Keep yourself from view as much as you can; muffle yourself well in your cloak. — In your absence, to give my restless mind something to do, I shall make ready all our luggage, and we will fasten it shut when you come back. Be off, keep yourself safe, and may God go with you."

"Will you not kiss me, Debby?"

"No, for that makes the shortest parting feel like an age-long absence. Be prompt about your business, and the kiss awaits you when you come back."

"At least let me take your hand, my dear?"

"No, nothing now — all when you are back again."

"Leave without kissing this brow whose every thought is of me, these hands that offer me such tender caresses, Debby? No, no! Surely you would not have it so! Such a departure would curse me. — Is it not said that no blade can wound the spot where the lips of one's love have touched."

"Oh! Then let me kiss you from head to foot, Patrick, allow me — I shall make you untouchable by any blade! Let me press my lips where your heart beats."

Deborah threw herself upon Patrick, her arms encircling his neck; she held him in a fervent embrace; she pushed his garments aside, pulled them open, and traced her closely-pressed lips across the breadth of his chest.

"Be off, go quickly, I feel no alarm now; I have armoured you in charms."

Patrick had barely gone forth, the entrance had barely swung closed after him, when a chaotic disturbance and repeated shouts — help! murder! — burst upon Deborah's hearing.

She threw the casement wide in frantic haste, and she made out Patrick's voice amid the clatter of clashing blades.

Yet in that lightless abyss of the street she could make out nothing whatsoever.

A thought came to her in an instant: she tore a drapery loose, kindled it at the flambeau, and pitched it through the open casement; the rush of air as it plummeted made the flames leap higher; it lit up the site of the affray with hideous brightness.

She caught sight of four attackers surrounding Patrick in vicious assault, four gleaming steel points aimed at his heart; he fought back with the ferocity of a lion.

At the sight of this, Deborah let out a terrible shriek and called to Patrick.

"Farewell, Debby, farewell!... I am finished," he cried to her! "...Farewell in this life! Debby, remember you have a child to live for!..."

"Yes! A son who shall repay this in blood!

"Be brave, hold your ground; strike them, strike! I am rushing to your side, I am coming!..."

At that very moment Patrick took a sword-point in the small of his back, and pitched forward onto the paving.

It all happened with the speed of a thunderbolt.

As Deborah burst into the street with the lodging-house folk following, the curtain, still aflame, gave off a dim glow; the street stood silent and deserted: no one to be seen!…

Only the sound, already distant, of a carriage racing through the streets at breakneck speed.

She made to run after it: but the shock had unmade her, she fell down in a swoon.

As she collapsed she struck against something that rang with a steely note; it was a sword wet with blood: Patrick's own.

Both she and the sword were lifted from the ground.

[1] *Contumax* (Lat.): a legal term denoting a defendant who has been tried and condemned in absentia, having failed or refused to appear before the court.

[2] Fredegunda (c. 543–597): Frankish queen consort of Chilperic I of Neustria, notorious for her ruthlessness, her persecution of enemies, and the numerous assassinations attributed to her order.

[3] Capua: ancient city of Campania whose luxurious pleasures were said, in classical tradition, to have softened and undone the army of Hannibal after his victory at Cannae (216 BC), rendering his forces incapable of pressing their advantage against Rome.

BOOK THE THIRD.

XXXII.

Upon reviving from her faint, Deborah found herself removed to her private rooms.

She required that she be left entirely to herself, wishing to be done with the flavourless sympathy that unfamiliar persons are apt to bestow in abundance — sympathy as trite as the formal bows and courtesies that pass for manners; and she turned away, despite every importunity, the ministrations of a nurse, unwilling to endure the presence of one who would have forced her either to put her grief on show, or to bear the misery of crushing it down beneath the weight of another's gaze.

Throughout that night she remained in a state of disturbance so violent as to approach insanity, laying at the door of the world, of Providence, of Fate itself, the blame

for her calamities; now heaping furious reproaches upon one, now upon another, now cursing them all alike; and after she had carried her fury through its full circuit — from Heaven down to earth, from humanity up to God — she rounded it upon herself at last, calling down upon her own head, one after another, every blasphemy that had escaped her lips. That she had been granted existence at all, that she had ever crossed the threshold of life — these were now her deepest regrets; and she besought death to come for her. By an impulse natural to those in the extremity of anguish, she struck her forehead again and again, as though she would crack it apart and permit the dreadful thoughts colliding within to rush forth; and she beat upon her bosom as one confined beats upon the walls of his gaol, hoping to burst it asunder and make a passage for her soul, trapped and mutinous, which raged against the bodily prison forcing it to endure existence.

There was even a moment, in the height of her derangement, when she unfastened a window and made as though to leap; but a stirring deep within her frame, suddenly reminding her that she bore life within her, awoke in her so terrible a sense of what she had nearly done that she shrank away and staggered back to cast herself upon the bed, all sodden with her tears.

Still, she asked herself: My son — will he ever know, will he ever be thankful, for the sacrifice I render him today? Is life, in truth, so precious a thing to receive? Shall he not one day reproach me bitterly for thrusting upon him this unwanted light of day — unwanted, yet which I should be guilty of a great wrong to steal away? And shall he not ask of me what I would ask of my wretched mother: Why not have stifled me within you, before ever I saw the world?

By the time morning broke, so spent was she that she had drifted into a faint drowse, from which the racket of her bell — tugged at with some violence — presently dragged her back. The fear that some unwelcome caller awaited her gave her pause; what was more, she was in such a state of disorder, and so entirely consumed by the chaos of her thoughts, that she felt herself incapable of offering even the barest semblance of civility — and so she hesitated; but then the idea — fantastic as she knew it to be — that Patrick might somehow have been spared and now stood without, was enough to vanquish her reluctance and to grant her the fortitude required to make her way, faltering, to the door.

Great was her amazement to see that it was Fitz-Harris.

"What! You dare show yourself here, scoundrel!" she burst out. "Is it another victim you seek? No — you shall not set foot inside!"

She would have closed the door in his face; but Fitz-Harris wedged himself in the doorway and stopped her from doing so.

"My lady, have pity — do not send me away thus! I am under orders to quit France, and quit it I shall; but not before I have spoken to Patrick, my oldest and truest friend, and bid him what may prove a farewell for all time! My heart is heavy with shame, with remorse, with gratitude. I come to throw myself at his feet, to beg him one last time to forgive all the evil I have caused him, and to acknowledge the immeasurable good with which he has repaid me. I owe my life to him!"

"Death — that is what he owes you! Villain — yes, go ahead, trample upon my grief! Work the iron round and round in my wound, take your pleasure in it! What a masterpiece of barbarity! To come before his widow seeking to bid farewell to the man whose murder you contrived — for you must have been among them, surely, you, such a true friend, among the villains who cut his throat?"

"Patrick dead — murdered! What words are these? Oh Heavenly Father!"

"Craven wretch, what a fine show of surprise you make; you knew nothing of it, naturally, you despicable pretender, that you had him killed — you yourself or your henchmen — yesterday, just below where I stood! But you seem quite intact,

not a wound mars you; so it was not your blood, then, in which he dipped his sword — this sword here? Oh, why did it not instead run you through the centre of your traitorous, black heart!"

The moment Fitz-Harris heard those opening words — words that left no uncertainty as to Patrick's fate — he was seized by a tremendous convulsion, his knees gave way, and he collapsed upon them, close to fainting outright.

For a time he remained with his head cast down, silent; then he looked up, and regarding Deborah with an expression of sorrowful affection, he said to her in a voice edged ever so faintly with reproach:

"I am aware, my lady, that I have wronged your husband most deeply; that I have been a friend unworthy of the name, a brother in name only; that I have called down upon his head derision and disaster. I betrayed him, that is the plain fact — him, with all his goodness and constancy. It was my own betrayal that revealed to me the full extent of his nobility! Oh, could you but conceive what torment gnaws perpetually at my soul for the evil I brought upon him! I bear within me a regret so venomous that it blights my life at the root, and will no doubt very soon extinguish it altogether! — Yes, spurred on by my jealous nature, I became a betrayer, a low and craven betrayer; but should that, madame, be grounds to burden me with the guilt of his death? Are there not several rungs on the

ladder that separates the man who does harm from the man who commits murder?

"I, the one who took your life, Patrick! What a monstrous idea! Oh, God above knows that I wanted nothing save to make good the injuries of the past, to spend whatever years remained to me in penance for my disloyalty!

"Poor Patrick, so you are lost to me for good! Have I truly let you go without hearing you speak forgiveness over me! Yet from on high, as surely as from the ground we walked together, you have it in your gift to pardon me, and I shall call upon you with such persistence that you will answer me at last!"

There are utterances that spring from the depths of the heart, inflections of truth so unmistakable that one cannot be deceived by them, for they lie beyond all artifice: thus Deborah, listening to these words spoken with such heartfelt passion, recognised that her fury against Fitz-Harris had carried her beyond what was fair, and she addressed him now in a more measured tone:

"I confess, sir, that my allegations have no doubt been excessively heated; but did your past behaviour not invite them, and does it not warrant them even now? One need not handle the weapon or deal the death-blow to be called an assassin; and in the ghastly tragedy that has deprived me of

my husband, the vileness of your conduct towards him must assuredly have exerted some influence."

Fitz-Harris proceeded to question her about the circumstances of Patrick's death; but Deborah would not answer him.

"How cruel that I should be exiled now, of all times, madam, when I am powerless to provide you — left as you are completely alone on alien soil, possibly with foes closing in around you — with that which any man both may and must extend to a woman: shelter and defence! Still, despite my present ruin, if it were your intention to quit France, I might, I think, still be of some use to you; it would be my joy and my pride if you would condescend to let me help.

"I make for Ireland; is it your design to journey thither as well? I could escort you on the voyage and take upon myself all the mundane arrangements, and most especially shield you from the unpleasant predicaments that a young lady of your beauty may from time to time face when undertaking a voyage of this nature.

"Do you desire to go somewhere else entirely? For your sake I would happily forswear all prospect of seeing Ireland once more; I would accompany you wherever you might choose to go; I would dedicate myself to following you, to sharing your fortunes! All that I could boast of, all that could

make me content, would be serving you as your lowly and obedient servant!

"Make use of me however you choose; I place myself at your disposal in penance."

"I will not deny that, forsaken and alone as I find myself, it would bring me comfort to have a friend who might assist me in climbing out of the pit into which I have fallen; indeed, such a friend would be exceedingly welcome, given that I mean to travel to Geneva and place both myself and my unborn child beyond the reach of Patrick's enemies — enemies who have become my own. May Heaven ordain that the child be a boy, and that he grow to be the one who avenges his father! But nothing from your hand can I receive, for I loathe you. To have dealings with you in any form would be wicked.

"Take your treacherous self elsewhere. I charge you most solemnly, whenever and wherever it might be, not to come into my sight again, nor to taint me with your speech or your looks."

"I beg of you, madam, in God's most sacred name, be kinder! Throw a dense shroud over what I have been, and for which I shall mourn inwardly all the days I have left! Take my service without hesitation; do not rob me of the sole means

remaining to me by which I might redress the enormous wrongs I have committed against you."

"I have made myself clear; I shall not relent; press me no further; away with you — my abhorrence is entirely yours!"

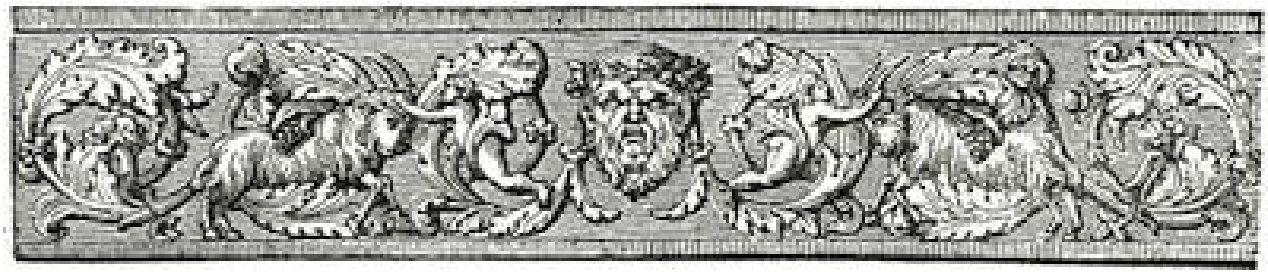
"Oh my lady, how little you resemble your husband in generosity of heart!"

"Forgiveness is not in my nature."

"In the name of all the saints, my lady, pardon me! Pardon a wrong of which I am heartily ashamed! Do not turn me out still weighed down by your hatred. Have mercy! Have mercy!"

"No, not for all eternity! Were I a man, I should run you through with this very blade; as a woman, the only arms I possess are those of the feeble and the old; so I curse you! Out of my sight! Damnation be yours!"

"If you join your curse, my lady, to the self-reproach that tears at my soul, you condemn me to death! God will hold you answerable for what becomes of me."



XXXIII.

After Patrick's dismissal, Madame Putiphar received a visit from M. le Marquis de Gave de Villepastour.

"Well now, good day, most charming Marquis," she said in the most agreeable manner, holding out for his salute a hand so encrusted with gems that one might have mistaken it for a jeweller's case.

"It gives me no small satisfaction, Madame, to find I have not yet incurred your displeasure: you make such swift work of refitting your sentiments with fresh attire that a man lives in perpetual anxiety, never knowing if he be raised upon the pavise or cast beneath it.

"That wretched Patrick! What a harsh and headlong plunge he has taken, from the summit of your love to the abyss of your loathing. The flame of your regard for him, one

must confess, was hastily snuffed out. Whatever can the honest fellow have done to provoke you so?"

"I give you my royal word, Marquis — he was wanting in respect towards me."

"Bah, the rascal!... And how far, Madame, did this disrespect proceed?..."

"Even unto the belt."

"Heavens! The impudent dog!... Madame, you were perfectly justified in disciplining this licentious fellow: people of his sort are a pestilence, a rotting sickness that afflicts both the Court and the wider world. Unless we would see the world descend into utter depravity, the moment has arrived to impose limits upon these questionable morals and check them in their overwhelming inundation. Ere long, Madame, if things continue in this selfsame course, no one will venture — by whatever means — to lay a hand upon a woman, to nibble a sweet, to turn the page of a book, or to settle into a chair; and a man will be obliged to encase himself in plate armour if he would escape violation. Just the other Sunday, in a preacher's address — witness the extent to which the wickedness of this iron age of ours has spread..."

"Nay, Marquis, call it sooner an age of quicksilver."

"...a friar thundered from his pulpit: 'Through sheer dissolution of morals are the children of today placed with wet-nurses.' "

"Alas, what can be done? These philosophers of ours are bringing everything to perdition."

"Principally those philosophers who concern themselves with economics."

"A man ought to be cautious when ridding a tree of grubs lest he dislodge the flowers: these fellows, in their zeal to shake away prejudice, have shaken away virtue into the bargain."

"They have set all things trembling, Madame.

"I shall not equivocate, gracious Queen: I do not come before you today with wholly disinterested motives. I stood by you with perfect loyalty when you punished an offence against decency; I now ask that you stand by me while I do the same."

"What would you have of me?"

"One of those sealed letters of confinement."

"Destined for whom?"

"A woman."

"The inamorata of our untamed creature, of course? Marquis, can it be that she has been wanting in respect towards you as well?"

"Exactly so."

"Pray tell, Marquis, how far did she go?"

"As far as your imagination cares to take it, Madame."

"You mean to immure this strait-laced thing, do you, precisely when she finds herself free? What nonsense! What obstacle do you face? Does a man not always possess the means to conquer a woman? A bit of heart, Marquis, and you will carry the day."

"You are kind, Madame; yet let a more expert seaman find his way through that narrow strait. I have cast my lot to the dogs and given up the chase."

"Dear me! So this is a fortress we speak of?"

"Aye, Madame, and lacking even a drawbridge. An impervious thicket of country scruples and virtues, calculated to bewilder and exhaust the sturdiest hunting pack ever assembled."

"So! The pretty thing affects to be untouchable.... We shall school her in better ways, Marquis.

"But tell me now — is she really a beauty?"

"Most beautiful indeed, Madame, replete with grace and with lively understanding.

"There — this is her portrait, which turned up at the barracks among Patrick's effects.

"It is especially that tone of English prudery she affects that appeals so strongly to us Frenchmen, grown weary as we have become of the shamelessness of our countrywomen."

"Unless this portrait flatters, she is quite genuinely a charming little thing. Your revenge shall be my concern, Marquis, and I shall combine it with my own: for I am not without my own reasons for ill will toward her. Give me a free hand, and your vengeance shall be accomplished to perfection."

"Madame, accept my deepest gratitude. I place the whole matter at your disposal: you are a master of these intrigues — no better advocate could I hope for. But should I be thought impertinent if I asked what manner of correction you reserve for this culpable creature?"

"Ah, that, my pretty man, is something I keep to myself."

"A mystery, loveliest of creatures, kept even from me?"

"Why trouble yourself about the means? Your sense of virtue shall be revenged!"

"I had flattered myself, perhaps presumptuously, that I enjoyed a fuller measure of your trust. Pray, Madame, do not amuse yourself with the creation of friends by halves: these halfway friendships are the most fatal arrangements imaginable."

"There, there, Marquis, pray do not smart so; you are well aware of our affection for you — you shall hear the whole of it presently, you naughty busybody!

"I have enemies in abundance, and they burn with indignation at the influence and sway I have kept with Pharaoh despite having lost his heart. With each passing day they redouble their exertions, spinning ever more elaborate webs to engineer my undoing. The past month has seen them grow more savage still in their efforts, and they have contrived — surely the twentieth time they have tried this — to wean him away from me by facilitating a connexion with a certain pretty little plotter. I was alarmed when I first learnt of it, but I am now all but convinced she will fail to oust me: Pharaoh has disparaged her in my hearing; he thinks her witless; she bores him. The least bit of novelty would be sufficient to sicken him of her altogether; yet we labour under a shortage — at the Parc[1] one finds merely two or three green girls being trained up, and not a single one ready to be picked. Should you not agree..."

. . . . . .

. . . . . .

"Oh! How perfectly delicious! Oh! What a stroke of divine ingenuity, Madame!"

"Can you assure me this girl is not, and will not become, a danger to my interests? She isn't one of those cunning, deceitful, scheming types?"

"Put yourself entirely at ease, Madame — this is an ingénue innocent of all worldly matters; and in any case, penniless, a foreigner, and without protectors, what action could she take? Were I to fear anything, it would be her absurd self-regard."

"Put that worry from your mind: La Madame shall take charge of the matter and school her appropriately. Fear not, my beautiful marvel — more stubborn natures than hers have been brought to heel."

Madame Putiphar sounded the bell and caused Lebel, the valet de chambre, to be called — he who served as clandestine steward of those disgraceful yet regal amusements — and she announced to him: "Success at last — we have found our perfect match! You will see to it that there is taken, this very day..."

"Marquis, where does she lodge?"

"At the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, rue de Verneuil."

"A young person, from Ireland or England.... Marquis, her name?"

"Her proper name is Deborah of Cockermouth Castle: but at that address she is to be found under the plain style of Lady Patrick Fitz-Whyte."

"This is entirely clear to you, dear Lebel; be off, and ensure this prize does not slip through your fingers: you shall answer to me with your life if you fail."

"Madame, these commands will be carried out to the letter."

"There now, Marquis — have I satisfied you?"

"Madame, I am among the Angels themselves! Words fail me in conveying the extent of my gratitude. Grant me leave to prostrate myself before your feet!..."

"Nothing of the sort: let me have your tactful mouth to kiss; and as reward for the love that has so long set you aflame, come and take supper with me tonight."

"Oh! I cannot survive such bliss, Madame!..."

"Come now, Marquis, you will live through it."

[1] The Parc: a discreet allusion to the Parc-aux-Cerfs, a house in Versailles maintained for Louis XV's private pleasures, where young women were installed for his use.

XXXIV.

Now that her mind was irrevocably made up to seek refuge in Geneva, Deborah betook herself to the abbey church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés — the place of worship she held most dear — to pray that God would smile upon her intention, or else direct her thoughts towards another path should this one be unacceptable in His sight.

There at the mouth of the choir, kneeling and prostrated quite to the ground, with her forehead pillowed upon her laced fingers, she shed tears unchecked, until the very pavement where she knelt was slick with weeping.

Four rough-looking men loitered near at hand, speaking in hushed voices to one another every so often. He that looked to be the chief among them cast his glance again and again between Lady Deborah and a tiny portrait in his

possession, as if he were intent upon establishing her identity thereby.

When a dispute arose between them and their voices grew loud, Deborah was startled from her pious absorption; she got to her feet, threw a glance their way, and instantly averted it again in a movement that betrayed both surprise and terror.

She had barely prostrated herself again against the paving, the better to hide her perturbation, when one of the ruffians stole close and threw a large mantle upon her. They wound her about in the thing, wrapping her up much as one might wrap a lifeless body, then hoisted her aloft and made off with her, paying no mind to her strangled cries or her convulsive weeping.

Reaching the great doorway, they pitched her into a waiting coach, whereupon the horses sprang forward at full speed.

Had they left her shrouded in such fashion, Deborah must have died; recognising this, they removed the wrapping straightway and put nothing upon her save a cloth about her eyes.

Her wits having come back to her at last, she demanded to know whither they were taking her; the men offered

nothing in reply, and throughout the length of the road they did not so much as open their lips.

Having travelled through endless twists and circuitous routes, the coach drew up as daylight was failing; a door was opened, and the carriage door too; Deborah was bidden to descend, someone taking her hand to guide her, but she refused point-blank, saying: "I will not budge until I am told where you mean to drag me." — They lifted her bodily and conveyed her into a hallway; hearing behind her the harsh thud of a weighty door closing fast, she was stricken with such horror that she cried out most piteously and crumpled fainting to the ground.

"In God's holy name," she pleaded repeatedly, her two graceful hands clasped tight, "take pity upon me, do not put me to death without letting me speak! For I am certain I am doomed to die, I am certain that death is poised above my head; the axe has already stirred the air about my neck. I beseech you, show me pity! It is not death I fear, nor do I cherish life now that you have killed my husband! I am not faint-hearted; no! no! I have strength enough to meet death! It is not for my own sake that I cry for mercy, but for the unborn child I carry, for I am to be a mother!... have pity on that innocent soul!…"

Nothing stirred in response, and her voice by itself, made huge by the echo, went rolling and thundering through the cavernous stairwell for what seemed an age.

"Have you brought me to a wasteland where none will heed my tears, or do I entreat monsters rather than men!… Surely you were not commanded to kill twice over; have pity on my baby! You have no cause to fear I shall escape you; lock me in a dungeon until I am brought to bed, and once my babe is delivered from my womb, you may sink your knives deep!"

While she was yet speaking the last phrase, an arm closed round her shoulders, a mouth planted itself on hers and began kissing her cheeks fervently. Deborah gave a shriek, one of those prolonged throaty gasps that speak of utter revulsion. Then came the voice of a woman saying:

"Have no fear, madame, nobody means to take your life, you are not being brought to any place of torment; none are about you here save those who hold you dear. Do get up and steady yourself, my dear creature. Go on, you men, escort my lady to her rooms."

When she had mounted the stairway and heard the screech of various bolts being shot, her blindfold was abruptly torn away, and there she stood in the midst of a chamber, staring at two ancient footmen clad in green livery,

creatures so repulsive and so grotesquely formed that she stepped back in alarm and cast herself face-first onto a sopha.

"Miss, we are yours to command, we have the honour of being selected to attend upon you," the two gargoyles informed her, making their obeisance. "We stand ready to serve you at every moment. Whenever you require us, you have but to pull the bell. Is there something you wish at this moment?"

"Yes. I insist you tell me at once what sort of den this is, and what manner of beasts you are?"

"Be at ease, miss, you are not in any jeopardy here. We are faithful servants of good character.

"We shall carry up your supper in one hour's time."

"Do not bother, sirs; peddle your poison to others!"

An hour later, true to their word, the same servants laid before Deborah a splendid supper; but for all their entreaties, she would have nothing to do with it, and though she was perishing with thirst she would not take even one glass of water. Once the table had been cleared, a waiting-woman came to suggest she should go to her rest; when she had helped her remove her clothing and settle herself between the sheets, she wished her a restful night and went off carrying the candle.

Fatigue and misery sent her quickly into sleep; but towards midnight she was roused from an agonising dream, and there in the solitude the entire ghastliness of her plight loomed up before her and hurled her back into the sharpest alarm. She wracked her imagination trying to puzzle out what place she was in, whose grasp she was caught in, and to whom she was now enslaved. The opulence of the chamber, the menservants, the solicitous care, the polite regard with which she seemed to be managed, ruled out any thought of being in a prison, and what was more, the clean country air and the smell of a dairy, which had impressed themselves upon her several times in the coach while they travelled, had convinced her almost entirely that she was some distance from Paris — and so she had conceived the idea that she had been taken by command of Monsieur de Villepastour, and delivered to one of his country villas.

Hourly she expected him to show himself, and steeled herself to fight back with the most unyielding defiance. Bent upon accepting death in preference to the merest insult, she was distressed to be without any weapon, and pursued by the bitter reflection that she had neglected to steal away a knife from the supper laid out for her.

Resolving to be forearmed against any midnight intrusion, she quitted her bed, opened wide the casement that gave upon a garden, and kept watch the night long by her

chamber door, listening with sharpened attention as the hours tolled, hoping against hope to discern the familiar chime of a clock she had known before. Yet no footfall disturbed her watch; and amidst the silent profundity of the night, only the alien chimes high in the towers reached her ears, measuring the passage of time she had come to detest, whilst ushering in the hours to come that overwhelmed her with nameless terror.

At daybreak the duennas[1] made their entrance, only to find her stretched asleep upon the sopha, sleep having plainly stolen upon her unawares; they fitted to her feet a dainty pair of slippers worked in coloured threads, and with courteous entreaty begged she would accompany them downstairs, an invitation she accepted with no small degree of trepidation.

They conducted her down an elegant flight of stairs and through corridors rich with carven work and flowering plants, till she entered a small chamber prepared for bathing, its walls sheathed in smooth stucco and veined marble brought from Aleppo.

A bathing-vessel fashioned of matching marble was at once filled with perfumed water of an agreeable warmth, and therein the duennas plunged her without delay.

Presently there came into the room a woman clad in sumptuous morning déshabillé, past the first bloom of youth,

plain of feature but bearing herself with uncommon distinction. She gave a signal, at which the pair of servitors took their leave, and thereafter she drew near and established herself at the very edge of the bath.

The moment she began to speak, Deborah knew the voice to be the very same as that of the lady who, the previous night, had spoken to her with such tender embraces.

First she made kind enquiry concerning her precious health and the manner in which she had spent the night-hours, after which she encouraged her to divest herself of every apprehension.

"You stand in no danger whatsoever, my charming Countess — not so much as a scratch shall trouble you," she cooed with treacly affability. "This house is under my governance, and I vow it upon my honour. Indeed, quite otherwise — you shall encounter here only such persons as are devoted to your pleasure and to the satisfaction of whatever you may fancy or desire.

"Can you hazard any guess as to what city this is, or as to the character of the place where you now find yourself?"

"No, madame, I cannot."

"Have you at any time visited Fontainebleau, or perhaps Versailles?"

"I have been to Versailles, madame — nowhere else."

"Were you introduced at Court? The King — do you know him? Did you ever see him?"

"Not once, madame."

"As you profess yourself to be in a delicate condition, I take it there must be some gentleman in the matter?"

"They slew him but the day before yesterday!"

"My poor girl! There now, summon your spirits — we shall leave nothing undone to give you comfort."

"Let me say at once that I spurn any consolation — I should esteem each such offering an outrage.

"I have replied to your enquiries with perfect candour and civility, madame. May I hope for like regard from you, and that you will be pleased to answer the question I am now to ask? Have I been accused of a crime, or am I held to be guilty of such?"

"Why, no, my lady, so far as I am aware."

"What authority, then, contrary to every principle of justice, has laid hands upon me and brought me here by force to be confined in this place?"

"It was to deliver you from the forlorn condition in which you stood — friendless and far from home — and from the penury into which you were like to fall, and into

which no daughter of an illustrious house ought ever to be permitted to fall."

"This concern shown for my welfare is excessive, madame — a meddlesome and offensive solicitude which I both censure and repudiate. May I not know, however, who claims to harbour such excessive goodwill for my person? On whose orders have I been delivered to this so-called sanctuary? What is this place, and what is to become of me within it?"

"It grieves me, my lady, as you may well observe, but I am not at liberty to give you satisfaction on these matters just yet. A few days hence, all will be made clear to you."

"Such a mystery must needs be either absurd or wicked, and I pay you the compliment of judging you too respectable to join in a silly piece of mummery, or too upright to make yourself accessory to some vile scheme. Pray tell me — am I held here in a State prison?"

"Can you truly imagine this place to be a dungeon, my lady? And does my person suggest that of a turnkey?"

"Should I understand this to be a nunnery?"

"You might well think it."

"For pity's sake, madame, do not suffer me to remain in such agonising doubt. The torture of it is dreadful. This is a misery I should be unable to bear much longer. You insist you

desire nothing but my ease and felicity — surely a little kindness is not too much to ask. Such silence tells me all I needed to know. I see how it is, I understand it all! Guard your precious secret as you think fit! This is the work of your patron, the Marquis de Villepastour — I am his prisoner."

"By no means, my lady — you have it all wrong."

La Madame now ceased speaking, with a show of irresolution, and gave herself up to what looked like inward contemplation. Here was a sly creature of the roads. Long had she been eager to spin one of her usual fabrications — the sort she served up to all her charges — but she held back, allowing herself to be coaxed and beseeched, the better to invest her tale with the appearance of veracity and privileged disclosure. In the end she took up her thread again:

"Listen to me, my dear girl. I harbour for you an affection you awakened in me the moment we met; there is something good in you, I think, and I would fain prove myself the same. Yet you must give me your word of absolute secrecy; since, in making known to you that which my duty would require me to suppress for many a day yet, I court no small danger. In order to gratify you I mean to be guilty of a considerable indiscretion, my honoured friend, but my regard for you is such that I cannot bring myself to say you nay. A prosperous lord of France, going by the title Count de Gonesse,[2] chanced to observe you repeatedly in

circumstances I am unable to specify, and having drunk deep of the most fervent and magnanimous passion for you, has caused you to be conveyed hither by stealth, thereby to shield you from the spite of those who wish you ill, and to set you safe from the manifold perils closing round you; you find yourself at Les Trois-Moulins, upon the outskirts of Melun,[3] one of his country seats for the summer months, whereof I hold the guardianship and superintendence. None could ever find you out in so hidden and impregnable a refuge. Here, in this deep tranquillity, you shall be at liberty to savour an existence of exquisite sweetness, giving yourself over entirely to the luxurious raptures of sorrow and wistful reverie."

"I must beg leave, madame, to place no faith in such a tale."

"Upon my soul, my lady, and by the ashes of him that gave me life, I vow before the throne of God that I speak the perfect truth."

"Were I to remain unconvinced by so solemn an oath, I should be charging you with treachery and wickedness so dreadful that the thought alone terrifies me: I choose rather, madame, to believe your account. But what aims does he pursue where I am concerned, this count of yours? What would he have of me?"

"He is one of those noble and tender-hearted souls whose sole ambition is to spread his protecting wing over you."

"Gentlemen of so selfless a disposition are hardly to be met with in the present age. I dare to think myself not incapable of judging such virtue at its just value, and of paying to it the tribute of admiration and gratitude it so richly warrants. Yet merely to bestow his protection upon me cannot be the whole design: what schemes has he in contemplation?"

"He aspires to win from you a reciprocation of his tender feelings."

"That I shall never do! All that I was perished with my husband and rests beside him in the grave."

"And by and by, once he has rendered himself acceptable in your judgment, he means to lay before you both his wealth and his hand in marriage."

"All of which I shall spurn. Vows have I uttered I do not mean to betray. Vengeance for my husband is my task, and I stand answerable to the unborn child I have beneath my heart."

"Whatever merit may reside in these rigorous principles, depend upon it that time will bring about their tempering. A

woman cannot persist indefinitely in widowhood so dismal and contrary to reason.

"There now, pretty one — time to come out, if you've no desire to sap your strength.

"You may lean with confidence upon my affectionate regard. There will be no bounds to my goodness and solicitude on your behalf. I offer you an open heart and a ready hand. Set your mind at rest; no harm will come to you while you are in my care. You have quite won my heart! So charming, so perfectly formed! Suffer me to plant a kiss upon that spotless forehead. So graceful a neck! Was there ever such alabaster perfection in a woman's shoulders?"

It was to gain the girl's trust and liking that La Madame laboured so hard to present a kindly aspect. Every attention that could be shown, every mark of respect that might be imagined, she lavished upon the girl, calculating thereby to win her goodwill for what was to come, and to make it impossible for her not to praise her custodian in the master's hearing.

She then gave her a hand out of the bath, and once the girl was standing made to strip away the linen sheet enveloping her, but Deborah seized it with both hands and would not let go.

"There now, my girl, toss away that sodden stuff and let me towel you properly. What, are you timid about showing yourself bare before me, before your own mother as it were? You are such an infant still!"

Deborah coloured to the roots of her hair and looked away, her lids falling.

"Tut, tut! Turning red like that! Prudishness is the refuge of the ill-favoured, not of such a one as yourself. You should glory in being so richly endowed with comeliness. You need never scruple to show off every excellence you possess. To hide such splendour beneath coarse fabric — what a waste! To wall up in corsetry this splendid bosom, so soft to the hand, yet as unyielding as burnished marble! — what a sin against beauty! I must… I cannot prevent myself! I must kiss it! Pardon these liberties I take — wonder compels me to them against my will."

"Please, madame, let me cover myself, and I beg you will restrain this immoderate display of wonder. Your looks rest upon me with an indulgence that goes beyond propriety. You make me burn with humiliation."

"My lady, the hand of God himself has shaped you. You are proportioned like an antique vessel of worth beyond price: your waist calls to mind its delicate stem, your hips its

swelling body. Your hips possess such amplitude that I am only just able to span them with my arms...."

"Take your hands from me, madame! You quite forget yourself — stop at once! You transgress all decency!…"

Her hand braced against her forehead, Deborah was forcing back the woman's head; La Madame had prostrated herself at the girl's feet and was grasping at her as one who supplicates for mercy.

"There now, don't be cross with me, sweet friend — to distress you is something I would never dream of doing. My mouth went where it ought not purely by mischance. Pray accept my apologies. My sense of the regard in which young women must be held is too keen for me ever to contemplate transgressing it. Yet surely you will not deny some trifling liberties — quite innocent ones — to your guardian who stands prepared to dedicate herself wholly to your service; surely you will not begrudge her at least the luxury of wishing things were otherwise. Alas, why was I not made what I wish I were — a comely young gentleman beloved of you! Lucky man, this count of yours! What sweet enchantments are destined to be his! What happier, more discerning choice was ever made by mortal man? Ah! How I envy him his good fortune!…

"But to what purpose such a fruitless desire to be a comely young fellow? For young men do not command every variety of love, every form of voluptuous delight. What I ought to wish for is only that I might find favour in your eyes. Be advised — I set great store by your friendship, and I mean to employ every means to obtain it."

"My affection has never been denied to any who seemed deserving of it, and I venture to trust, madame, that you will prove yourself entitled to a goodly share."

"You have only to will it, my lady, and you shall convert your guardian into your most devoted slave. Until later, sweetheart — I shall look in on you directly, this very evening if I can manage it. Ring for your maids — they shall take you back to your chamber, where breakfast is to be laid out for you. You will find yourself attended today by my two subordinate matrons."

True to the woman's word, Deborah came upon a table in her apartment spread for three covers and richly supplied with cold collations, side dishes, and bottled refreshments. She stood at the window in a brown study whilst her two guests made ready to join her. Turning over in her mind what she had lately been told, she asked herself if she should credit the existence of this Count de Gonesse; what kind of creature he might prove to be; whether in truth Heaven had, in her forsaken state, provided her with a formidable

champion, and, if charity were not his spur, what motive might have driven this nameless stranger to orchestrate her kidnapping; what lot was being prepared for her, and at what cost to herself she would purchase this vaunted protection.

Her mind revisited as well the strange performance La Madame had enacted after the bath was done. The fondling, the excessive flattery, the pawing hands, the burning glances, her unseemly kisses, that visible disturbance, those shuddering fits, her courtly endearments — it all appeared most singular to her innocent mind. She had nothing in her experience to match it with save the tender demonstrations of Patrick's affection, a parallel that only deepened her bewilderment; the guileless young creature had not the faintest notion of depravity in any form.

Seldom is it the man who plants and tends the crop who gets to taste its earliest yield. What we find for sale in the marketplace is merely what the insects, the woodland creatures, and the birds have left behind. It was in this wise that Pharaoh, by establishing with such lavish outlay a harem for his own pleasure, had unwittingly provided one for the procuress, who helped herself liberally to his slave-girls before ever he laid eyes on them. What reached his princely bed was but the waiting-woman's leavings.

Following a brief spell of abstraction, it occurred to Deborah on a sudden impulse to look about her rooms,

which she had not as yet taken the trouble to inspect. The walls were hung with framed prints and pictures; she moved towards them for a better view, then shrank away in horror and loathing; nothing met her eye but images of nakedness, libertine excesses, obscene tableaux — and one in particular illuminated for her the meaning of La Madame's conduct in her presence and those cryptic pronouncements she had let fall.

After viewing these abominations, she could no longer put faith in any notion of the count's high-minded charity. She realised that she had been placed in the keeping of contemptible villains, perhaps even within the walls of a bawdy-house. At the very thought her soul rose up in insurrection; the force of her character, which had lain dormant, came flooding back, and she swore to herself that she would defy them at every turn, confront all their designs with a will both stubborn and unbreakable, and exhaust their patience so completely through her wild and ungovernable temper that her captors would have no choice but to restore her to freedom.

In a transport of fury and desperation, she ran to the door, secured it with double lock and bolt, and then, snatching the paintings from the walls one after another, sent them crashing through the open casements. Down they went with a hideous clamour, the breaking glass adding to the

dreadful racket. Ranged about the mantelshelf and on various pieces of furniture were porcelain figurines and biscuit-china[4] ornaments of an equally obscene character, which she dashed to pieces with a crash no less violent. There was, in one corner of the room, a glass-doored press stuffed with licentious reading matter; after running her eye over the titles, she flung the entire contents out to join the wreckage of paintings on the courtyard flags.

Alarmed by such a terrible racket, the domestics and La Madame hurried to Deborah's apartment and knocked with frantic persistence.

"Unlock the door, my lady!" cried La Madame. "What can have come upon you, my beautiful child? Tell me what is wrong! Do let me in, I beseech you!"

"The door stays shut!"

"For pity's sake, tell me what you want! You shall be indulged in everything. If your chambers displease you in any particular, alterations shall be made forthwith. Has someone been remiss in treating you with the deference you deserve? I implore you — no more throwing things into the courtyard! Collect yourself, I pray! But speak to me, my lady — and unlock this door!"

"I will tell you what you are — a loathsome woman plying a loathsome trade! You picked the wrong victim, and

you shall not have the easy time of it you expected. Your schemes and yourself alike I stamp upon! Besiege my young eyes with such depravity as you like — my soul you shall not pollute! Lies, all lies! This is no honest nobleman's home — not the Count de Gonesse's establishment, but the lair of a wretch! I stand within a house of that description which decency forbids one to name, and you have marked me out, I make no doubt, for the commerce of my flesh with whatever libertines may come."

"Upon my soul, my lady, and by every Angel in heaven, these dreadful notions of yours are false — quite false and monstrously unfair! What pitiless treatment you afford me! I serve a man of honour, being myself a woman of honour, and you have been given safe haven in his domain — so much is true, and the Almighty knows it! Who has poisoned your mind with such wrath and such hideous imaginings? Can it be the impropriety of those paintings that has upset you so? They were left behind by whoever lodged here before you. I charged your attendants most especially to have them taken out, but the rascals mind me so ill! I ask your forgiveness with all humility. My lady, why refuse admittance to one who has shown you such goodness? Oh, you would try the patience of a saint! I insist you open it at once!"

"Madame, you ask in vain."

"Very well — we shall open it by force."

"That remains to be seen."

When she saw there was no reasoning with a temper so inflamed and a resolution so fixed, La Madame took herself off.

Between the bathing and her fit of anger, Deborah's last reserves of energy were spent — and she had had no nourishment since the previous day's afternoon — so she applied herself to her meal. Though very hungry indeed, she helped herself with considerable economy, careful not to make too deep an inroad into her meagre stores — for on them would depend how long she could hold out against her besiegers. La Madame tried her luck again and again as the hours passed, knocking and pleading afresh each time. To this Deborah returned no response whatever.

Next morning she was jolted awake by three thunderous knocks.

"Who's that?" she called out. On this occasion a great booming voice called, "In the name of the King and Justice — unlock at once!"

Still abed, Deborah called back, "Are the King and Justice all-powerful?"

"Indeed they are!" came the response from Monsieur de Cervière — for he it was who spoke.

"Then I suggest they open it for themselves and step inside."

"Be reasonable, my lady, I entreat you, and do not make it necessary for me to use stern methods."

"Who might you be, to speak of using force?"

"I am this castle's governor."

"Your authority over this building does not extend to my person."

"Come, my lady, this is no time for wit."

"Then let us have no more of you, sir."

"But what do you mean by this, immuring yourself in such fashion?"

"That is rather a stupid question, Monsieur le Gouverneur, if I may say so — you could have done without it."

"To what purpose is this obstinacy? You must submit before long, one way or another. It is madness to think of withstanding a blockade with no stores laid in; and whom do you imagine you are defying? Those who wish you nothing but well! Come, give way, I implore you — you have my word of honour that you shall suffer neither blame nor penalty. An old campaigner does not lie."

"Your word I take, sir, whatever your age or profession — but know that I will not be talked into submission. Hear me clearly, sir: nothing will shake my resolution — I will not quit this chamber unless it be to quit this vile house altogether, and I shall unbolt the door for Monsieur Goudouly and no other — he who owns the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, my former lodging. Either send to the Rue de Verneuil for Monsieur Goudouly, or let me be."

"'Sblood! This is what comes of handling you with delicacy!" exclaimed Monsieur de Cervière in accents of coarse, violent wrath. "You ask for harsh treatment — then harsh treatment you shall have! Think you it is so great a challenge to force our way to you and batter down this door? Well, we shall soon discover…"

He said no more, and she heard his footsteps retreating along the passage and down the staircase; a moment later, heavy footsteps in military time shook the planking, stopping just outside the door, where muskets rang out as they struck the stone flags.

"For the last time, my lady, by order of the King and the Law — open at once!"

"Once again, sir, I tell you — in the name of King and Law alike, the door remains shut! His Majesty would never

sanction the infamy of his people, and the Law cannot be twisted to serve iniquity."

"Men! Proceed with your orders…"

The command given, savage blows from musket-stocks rained upon the door, yet the solid barrier, buttressed by all the furniture Deborah had dragged into place, scarcely budged.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur, attend to what I say," she called out, perceiving herself forced to this desperate pass. "I scorn you, I defy you, and death too I shall defy! If your object in battering at this door is to get hold of me, you waste your time — you shall never have me! Once you have smashed through the door and overturned my defences, and I am left with nowhere else to turn, I shall invoke God's name and pitch myself through that window to dash my brains out on the pavement below."

A few further strikes were delivered, yet these lacked the former intensity and determination. In the midst of the uproar La Madame's voice broke through; the hammering stopped, and she could be heard addressing Monsieur de Cervière: "This is a girl who will stop at nothing — for heaven's sake, don't goad her into it. If harm should come to her, the fault will be reckoned mine. We must take no more action without authority from higher quarters."

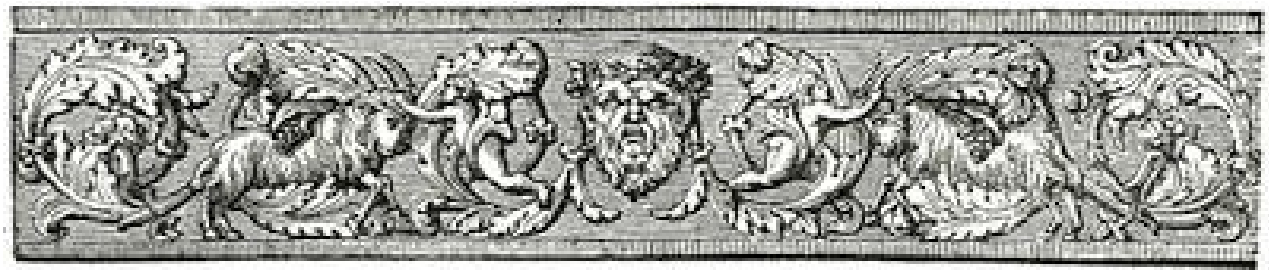
Following a brief muttered conference, the besieging party withdrew, and the corridor grew silent again.

[1] Duennas: older women appointed as chaperones or attendants to younger ones; the term, borrowed from Spanish, carries an air of institutional surveillance rather than mere domestic service.

[2] Count de Gonesse: Gonesse is a town north of Paris, historically noted as the source of the finest bread supplied to the royal court. The name, applied to this fabricated nobleman, may carry an ironic colouring.

[3] Melun: a town on the Seine some forty kilometres south-east of Paris, capital of the Seine-et-Marne département; its proximity to Fontainebleau gave it associations with royal and aristocratic country retreats.

[4] Biscuit-china: unglazed porcelain fired once only, prized in the eighteenth century for statuettes and decorative figures; the term distinguishes it from the glazed ware used for tableware.



XXXV.

It was already the third day of Deborah's defiant confinement when, in the course of pacing about her apartment, she spotted pencilled on the wainscot these words in Italian: CERCA QUI, TROVERAI. There was something cryptic in the words that caught her imagination; they could hardly have been inscribed there by accident, she thought, and surely they concealed some private meaning. She subjected every inch of the chamber's woodwork to close scrutiny, hoping to discover some further inscription that might elucidate the first; but finding nothing, she came back to the original words: CERCA QUI, TROVERAI. "Seek here and thou shalt find." — Could it be merely a scriptural saying? Was the intention figurative or should it be taken at face value? CERCA, search. The direction leaves no room for doubt. QUI, here. But here where? In these chambers? In this house of sin? In this vale

of tears? Or literally here, at this very point? TROVERAI, thou shalt find. Find what, precisely? Ah, that is the meat of the secret; that is the trophy for whichever mind — be it fortunate or acute — can pierce through to the meaning. "Very well, let me begin looking...."

She thereupon let her eyes travel over all the surrounding surfaces, rapping on the wainscoting to see if any spot might sound hollow beneath her knuckles. Quite suddenly she observed, directly beneath the written words, a section of the decorative border that had come loose close to the skirting. She worked her fingers into the crevice; the yielding panel gave way a little; her whole hand slipped through and touched upon some article, which she clutched with shaking hands and hauled into view. It was only a small Italian volume containing Petrarch's rhymes; she gave it a shake to rid it of dust and flipped through the sheets, finding nothing inserted there. Welcome though the find was, arriving as it did at just the right moment to provide diversion in her lonely confinement and address her in a tongue for which she felt the keenest affection, she remained doubtful that this alone could be the whole solution to the riddle, and she reached behind the woodwork a second time, but now her hand found nothing. Taking up the Petrarch again, she went and seated herself upon the couch to read over the sonnets she loved best. As she opened the volume, her eyes lighted on the blank guard-

leaf facing the frontispiece: covering it was a cramped, miniature, spherical script much like the writing she had found on the woodwork. Not without labour did she at length puzzle out these words:

> *Whosoever you may be, you who have unlocked the riddle of my inscription, know that I love you and seek your friendship. I trust this little work will yield you as much satisfaction as it gave me, and help you now and then to put aside whatever pain is gnawing away at your spirit. You are surely confined here against your will, as I myself was for four long years. Tomorrow is the day — tomorrow I walk out of here a free woman! You cannot know, I suppose, what is to become of you, and the uncertainty must prey upon you constantly. Come, set your mind at rest; let your heart be light: what lies before you is beautiful, surpassingly beautiful! A gossiping valet spilled the whole story to me, making me supremely happy; I would fain do the same service for you. No doubt you were seized from your kinsfolk, as I was; and they will have fed you the same fiction they served to me — that a rich seigneur, inflamed with noble passion, keeps you concealed in one of his retreats until such time as matrimony becomes possible? Every bit of it is invention: This place is Versailles, the notorious house of the Parc-aux-Cerfs; the gentleman who has already visited your bed, or who will shortly do so, is Pharaoh — His Majesty in the flesh! Grasp what*

extraordinary happiness is yours. I bear his child within me, the offspring of royalty — oh, what bliss! What did you ever do, poor Maria, to deserve so great a prize? My prayers have been heard on high — I begged Heaven so desperately to give me this by-blow! May you too be so favoured by Providence — I wish it for you with every fibre of my being! Act as though you know nothing of what I have just revealed to you: if they were to get wind of your being in possession of such intelligence, you would be undone and your splendid prospects destroyed past all hope of restoration. Secrete this book safely away and rip out this sheet.

Keep me in your prayers and do not let the name Maria-degli-Angeli slip from your memory — so I was called in Ferrara; you may be certain I shall remember you as well, beautiful nameless girl, for beautiful you must assuredly be, as I am, else why should you have been singled out as I was? Would that I could kiss you!

Bewildered and aghast at what she had just discovered, Deborah wept bitterly and lay for a great while in dismal despondency. After brooding in the blackest despair for some while, all at once — like sunshine breaking through after a tempest — her mental horizon brightened, and she judged that her present situation was, when all was said, preferable to being at the mercy of the Marquis de Villepastour. By and by she grew convinced that this was actually a piece of good

fortune that would be her salvation, and she resolved on the spot to alter her behaviour completely, to become the obedient, sweet-tempered, winning, well-regarded girl, thereby to bring forward as speedily as she could the day when Pharaoh would visit her.

Having removed and reduced to tiny fragments the page from her Petrarch — these she hid with care in the chimney — she knelt and thanked the Lord for standing by her in her hour of need, for alerting her to the dangers lying in wait, and she besought Him to pour blessings upon the hapless Maria-degli-Angeli, that unwitting tool of His benevolent design.

She lifted herself up and gave the bell-rope a pull to fetch the attendants. One of the matrons came hurrying along and started her shrill yapping outside the door. Deborah told her to present her respects to the mistress of the establishment and ask if she would be good enough to wait upon her.

XXXVI.

Maria-degli-Angeli's words proved accurate: the ill-fated Deborah occupied premises of royal magnificence and shameful purpose alike.

The inmates — or "pupils," to give them the name by which the captives of the Parc-aux-Cerfs were known — were guarded after the Oriental fashion of harem-keeping, though here, instead of those eunuchs of the East made perfect in their kind, one found a goodly collection of decrepit ogres, time-worn monstrosities remarkable chiefly for their excessive and shocking want of comeliness.

In attendance upon the inmates of superior rank were the *holvagees*,[1] who wore green coats that put one in mind of summer insects. No such finery marked the *baltagis*,[2] who went about in grey dress of an unremarkable character. These matters, along with every nicety of form and precedence observed within those walls — observed, mark you, with a

punctiliousness surpassing anything known at Court — were of Pharaoh's own ordaining.

Supplementing these abominable *agiam-oglans*[3] was the *Kizlar-Agha*[4] or *Kuzlir-Agasi* — he whose charge was the guarding of innocence — ironically christened M. de Cervière, and holding rank nearly equivalent to that of the *Kapi-Agha*.[5] A former major of the army, he was a terror to behold, appointed to administer the place and maintain supreme control over all its servants — *bostangis, capigis, atagis, halvagis, and baltagis*. He was charged with pacifying mutinies among the sultanas, turning back all assaults from outside, capturing whatever secret communications might pass, and driving off — and indeed punishing — any brazen trespassers who dared penetrate as far as the *odalisques*.[6] Should occasion demand, he held the right to secure reinforcement from a body of *spahis*[7] lodged nearby, men who had received the strictest instructions to obey him at the first summons.

A female Kuzlir-agasi had been appointed to oversee the accounts, uphold decorum, see to it that the odalisques spent their leisure in no objectionable manner, and especially to keep them from growing too familiar with one another. She went by the name of Madame Dumant, if I am not mistaken, though none ever called her anything save "La Madame". A woman of mean birth she might be, but she was blessed with

so remarkable a talent for methodical governance that Pharaoh thought most highly of her, and was wont to observe: "Should she ever by some miracle wake up a man, I shall appoint her my *Chasnadarbachi*[8] on the spot."

Next in authority came a pair of deputy madames, charged with bearing the elder odalisques company, dining from time to time with the fresh inmates to teach them the refinements of good breeding, and to be present at whatever lessons in dancing, music, literature, and painting were given.

A company of duennas, perhaps a dozen in number, creatures of humbler standing prepared for all occasions and all labour, exercised vigilant and exacting surveillance over the pupils.

Whatever was degrading or toilsome in the way of labour fell to serving-maids and *baltagis*, these too having been chosen with prudent regard for their advanced years and offensive looks.

This whole unclean tribe of menials drew liberal salaries; but let one prove indiscreet in the least degree, and off they went to decay in some lightless pit.

Odalisques of all ages dwelt there, some as young as nine or ten, others approaching twenty. Upon reaching fifteen, the secret of their whereabouts was no longer kept from them; but all means were employed to turn their minds from any

notion that they were meant for Pharaoh's couch. Should it be suspected that they had learned their actual destiny, whether by chance or from some confidence betrayed, they were promptly dismissed, sent to take the veil in a cloister or religious house, or, if they happened to be with child, married off.

Each month the seraglio required an expenditure of roughly one hundred and fifty thousand livres, solely for the feeding and keeping of the harem and for paying the wages of all employed persons and domestics. Distinct from these expenses were the salaries of the procuring *Bachas*, the compensation offered to families or else the purchase money for the children, the portions settled on them when they departed, the various presents made to them, and the bounties paid for base-born infants. Altogether it made for an extravagance exceeding two million a year. The Parc-aux-Cerfs ran France to the tune of about five million every year.

Its existence spanned thirty-four years.

Madame Dumant's successor in the office of superintendent, appointed not long after Madame Putiphar's demise, was of one of Burgundy's best families, and was a sometime canoness of a chapter open only to the well-born.

As soon as word reached the courtiers that this harem had been formed, they began outdoing one another in their

quest for the position of *Kapi-Agha*; but Pharaoh held their grasping ambition and their sycophancy in derision, and, causing them no small heartbreak, left matters in the charge of Lebel the founder, his *hazoda-baschi*,[9] subject to the suzerainty of Bacha Phélipeaux de Saint-Florentin.[10]

[1] Holvagees (Turkish *helvaci*): confectioners of the imperial household, here repurposed by the author as a term for attendants of superior rank, following the usage recorded in Sir Paul Rycaut's *The Present State of the Ottoman Empire* (1665).

[2] Baltagis: officers commanding the imperial guards responsible for protecting the palace grounds, rowing the Sultan's barge, and maintaining the gardens.

[3] Agiam-oglans: menial servants of the Seraglio, typically Christian boys taken captive at ten or twelve years of age and consigned to laborious service within the palace.

[4] Kizlar-Agha ("agha of the girls"): formally the Agha of the House of Felicity, head of the eunuchs guarding the Imperial Harem from 1574 onward, one of the most powerful offices in the Ottoman state.

[5] Kapi-Agha: the Chief White Eunuch who superintended the Seraglio's eunuch servants until the late sixteenth century, when his authority was eclipsed by the Kizlar-Agha.

[6] Odalisques: female slaves or concubines of the harem, particularly those of the Sultan; the word entered French and

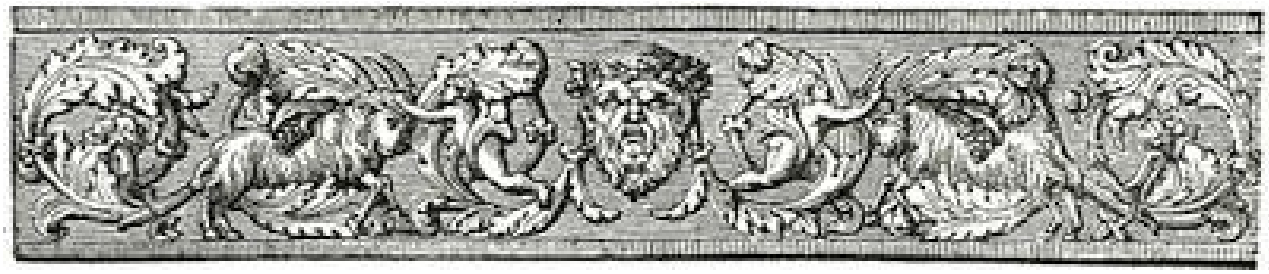
English usage via Ottoman Turkish *odalık*, from *oda*, "chamber."

[7] Spahis: members of the Turkish irregular cavalry; by extension, any mounted troops in Ottoman or Ottoman-influenced service.

[8] Chasnadarbachi (also *Chasnatarbassi*): Grand Treasurer of the Seraglio, responsible for disbursing funds for the Sultan's daily expenditures and minor pleasures.

[9] Hazoda-baschi: principal commander of the Royal Chamber within the Ottoman palace hierarchy.

[10] Phélipeaux de Saint-Florentin: Louis Phélypeaux, Comte de Saint-Florentin (1705–1777), Secretary of State for the King's Household under Louis XV, who administered the *lettres de cachet* and held effective oversight of establishments such as the Parc-aux-Cerfs.



XXXVII.

In the brief interval preceding Deborah's appearance at the Park, Madame Putiphar had penned this letter to La Madame:

This evening, my dear superintendent, you shall in all likelihood receive a young Irish countess — Deborah is her name — whom I despatch to you for instruction. Her portrait alone has come before my eyes; she appeared to me well-favoured, exceedingly well-favoured. I have it on the authority of one more intimately familiar with her person that she abounds in graces and allurements beyond counting, and is certain to captivate Pharaoh. Let her have your most sedulous attentions; lose no time in shaping her; I mean for her to be placed at his disposal in the near future. The training of her will doubtless cost you considerable application; I shall not be unmindful of your troubles, for I am given to understand that her temper is far from tractable, and to compound matters, she is one of those creatures bloated with righteousness and rides her principles with tiresome rigour. A thoroughgoing inversion of her character is

what I require of you. Leave no means untried in winning her over; spare neither cajolery, nor lies, nor pledges of advancement. Your principal task must be to uproot from her soul all sentiment of maidenly propriety. Perchance her reserve springs from ignorance alone — she has never been shown what pleasures are to be had from a life of abandon; lay them bare to her, each and every one. Work without intermission upon her fleshly inclinations; surround her with nothing that is not calculated to excite, give her no books save those of a dissolute tendency, and feed her upon such viands as are known to rouse the lower appetites. With such instruments at your disposal, I venture to believe, you will conquer her resistance and bring about a most desirable alteration in her disposition. Upon the occasion of Pharaoh's first call, see to it that you blend into whatever she drinks a measure of such stimulants as excite the passions.

I ask your forbearance in despatching to you so great a quantity of business. I entreat you to bring to bear upon this matter, for my sake, the whole of that patience, address, and ingenuity with which I know you to be blessed, and which has served us well in the past.

Pray accept in anticipation my sincerest expressions of thankfulness.

La Madame was swift to send back word in answer to this missive, and to make known to Madame Putiphar the insurrection into which Deborah had broken forth:

Two evenings past, esteemed mistress, your Irish pupil was brought to me. A pretty thing she truly is; I observed her unclothed, at her bathing; her form is lovely, faultlessly proportioned; she carries herself with grace, speaks in agreeable tones, and her breeding is unmistakably superior. She cannot fail to delight Pharaoh, if only I can master her; but of this I have scarcely any expectation. What we have here is a terrified and rebellious virgin; she will not be readily brought to heel. As I write, she is engaged in outright insurrection. In accordance with your wishes, I had adorned her rooms with figurines, paintings, and indecent literature; yet yesterday, about the time of the morning meal, the prim miss discovered these shameful articles and was seized with such fury that she shut herself up, turned the key, and flung the whole lot through the windows. All my petitions, all my begging has failed to pacify her or to prevail upon her to open up. Monsieur de Cervière has this instant encountered a like want of success. He found himself unable to budge her with either persuasion or bluster; she made a laughing-stock of him. Vexed beyond measure, he called in the guard to terrify her into submission and to batter down the door, which she had secured on the inner side with every moveable object at hand; yet the door stood firm and the girl

more stubborn still, and milady gave warning that if they broke into her chamber by force, rather than yield she would throw herself out of the casement. I thought it prudent to abandon the siege at this pass and to curb Monsieur de Cervière's belligerent zeal; the wench, if pressed too far, would surely have made good on her promise. Finding myself in so hazardous a position, I thought it best not to take matters into my own hands; I await, consequently, whatever counsel and orders you may see fit to give.

Madame Putiphar responded thus:

Let hunger do your work for you; it will not be long before she finds herself so spent with fasting that she must of necessity capitulate and yield herself to your discretion. Be immeasurably gentle with her; do not reprimand her, and by no means chastise her. Do not, going forward, set yourself in plain opposition to her upright notions; no longer clash head-on with her sense of propriety. Trickery and dissimulation alone will secure you the conquest of this virago. Make use of approaches that are devious and covert. Manoeuvre cunningly, lead her astray, win her over by underhanded means; but on no account join battle with her directly.

XXXVIII.

Scarcely had Deborah despatched her invitation when La Madame appeared, hurrying up the stairs, and was thoroughly amazed to encounter the doorway unobstructed and gaping wide.

"Should you find me yielding, madame, attribute it not to any failure of provisions — observe, if you will, how this table remains laden with supplies," Deborah remarked with dulcet sweetness, "but to a worthy sentiment proceeding from my heart, which I trust you will be good enough to recognise. Most humbly do I crave your forgiveness for suffering myself to be swept away by wrath, and for the unseemly commotion I have occasioned under this roof. Yet, brought up as I have been in the sternest rigour of principle, and having had instilled within me, as thoroughly as any lesson was ever learned, a revulsion toward impurity, I could not but feel deeply affronted by those representations upon the walls. I pledge to you most earnestly that I shall conduct myself with less zealotry going forward."

"Such a return to reason — and I cannot commend it sufficiently, my lady — charms me more than it takes me by surprise; I held fast to my belief in your essential goodness, and that what occurred was nothing more than a momentary derangement born of perfectly warranted indignation. Permit me to ask your forgiveness for those indecorous things you came upon in these lodgings, which you showed excellent judgement in shattering; as I have told you before, they were the property of an old man who dwelt in these quarters several months since, and I had directed the servants to take them away, but one is so abominably ill-obeyed nowadays. I entreat you particularly to have the goodness never to speak of this to Monsieur le Comte de Gonesse; his principles regarding decorum are so exacting that such an ill-fated piece of neglect would forever remain unforgiven."

"You have my word, madame — I shall be the soul of discretion."

"Your poor little insides — have they not endured considerable torment during this three-day fit of pique? Now you will oblige me by conducting them down to dinner; I mean to regale them magnificently, like the prodigal child of scripture, in recompense for its sufferings — but we must first occupy ourselves with your appearance. The beautiful things you are to wear have been made ready."

La Madame thereupon had a dress brought in — a glorious thing the colour of toasted bread, cut in the most delightful style; when Deborah put it on, it proved a perfect fit and suited her ravishingly. Quite intoxicated with delight, La Madame whirled about her this way and that, settling a fold, fluffing out a panel — one might have thought her dancing some nursery game of tag. She seized Deborah about the waist with her fingers, trailed a lascivious hand across her hips and the swell of her backside; she planted kisses upon her arms, her shoulders, and her back in that little vale the shoulder-blades make, and along the groove of the spine. These arch little fondlings were liberally interlarded with flattery and appreciative ejaculations. Once she had worked through her full inventory of admiring observations:

"One piece of finery more," she announced, "and you will be the most beautiful of all the cherubs."

A servant-girl, having received some whispered instruction, came back directly and placed a jewellery box in her hands. Out of it she pulled a long gold chain which she draped about Deborah's neck; attached to the chain hung a locket displaying Pharaoh's portrait in the dress of a gallant rover.

"This, my beauty, is the Count de Gonesse's gift; the little portrait is his very likeness; being presently separated from you, he was determined that his image should never leave

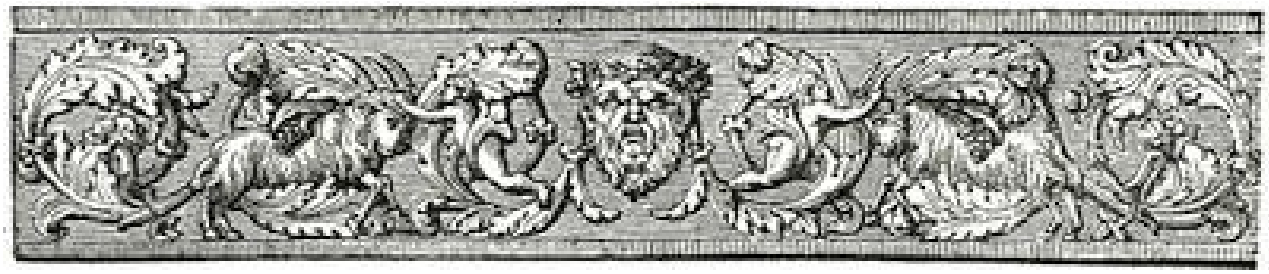
your sight, and has invested this jewel with authority to rest against your heart pending the time when he himself may claim that resting place."

"His lordship the Count is far too gracious and good; such abundant favours quite confuse me. In truth, I am not deserving of him or his affections."

"Are you pleased with his lineaments? Tell me, what do you make of him?"

"I think him exceedingly handsome; there is nobility and sweetness in his countenance, and his eyes speak of kindly feeling."

"Come now, come, my dearest lady, you are simply divine! You are a perfect darling!"



XXXIX.

Deborah counterfeited meekness with such address that she was swiftly received back into La Madame's affections — nay, she penetrated those good graces more thoroughly than she had any wish to do. Unceasing were the fawning ministrations that beset her, the anticipations of her every want, the stream of flattery; she was positively besieged by La Madame's presence and devotion — a devotion that amounted to true courtship, persistent and wrought with a refinement of gallantry that men in our own day no longer understand. Such joy she found in the petty spoils a lover pilfers from the beloved — those consecrated trifles! Each discarded trinket of Deborah's was salvaged with tender solicitude, along with all the faded blossoms that had once been fastened to her bodice or woven through her hair. Twice or thrice, when she had allowed her tenderness to overflow in too heated a protestation, she had received harsh treatment for her pains; and so, despairing now of ever awakening a kindred sentiment, she had entrenched

herself within respectful limits, practising a sort of adoration more intense than contemplative and yet not quite platonic. Many a morning Deborah was roused by soft groans and deep sighing, only to find a hand laid upon her bosom and La Madame at her side all aquiver, perched there as one might sit upon a bank and leaning over her in rapture as though she beheld herself mirrored in some trembling water.

Madame Putiphar received swift intelligence of the manner in which Deborah's mutiny had been settled, and of her conversion to obedience. Henceforward Lebel devoted himself to acquainting his master with the new resident of the Parc, a young countess of Irish birth, delightful, refined, and altogether bewitching, bestowing upon her such lavish and magnificent eulogies as were best suited to render him eager to know more. She sat for her likeness on several occasions, attired differently each time; the resulting portraits were arranged for his inspection, and had the felicitous effect of delighting him. His appetite thus whetted and his interest thoroughly provoked, Pharaoh declared his intention to possess her forthwith.

With Deborah's state of expectancy daily more apparent, Pharaoh's keenness proved most opportune, and they set about satisfying his caprice without hesitation. The necessary dispositions were all put in place for receiving him properly. The morning of the day set aside for their first audience

having dawned, milady was invited to go down to the bath-chamber, where her duennas occupied themselves for the better part of several hours in arranging her tresses and applying fragrant oils. La Madame bade her come and breakfast with her, and all through the repast urged her to behave in the most charming manner possible, to summon forth every weapon in the arsenal of her intellect and her beauty so as to captivate her adorer completely; she praised her enviable lot, felicitated her upon securing the affections of so noble, so rich, so potent a gentleman, and drew for her a vivid picture of all the pleasures, all the riches and all the fame that were to be hers; at last she brought matters to a close with that variety of instruction which a mother breathes, when the newly-wed pair withdraw for the night, into the untutored ear of her daughter.

After the meal she took her back to her own quarters, where everything had been arranged most enchantingly, and clothed her in nothing more than a loose robe of rose satin, remembering to fasten about her neck the gold chain bearing its medallion. As two o'clock — the hour fixed by Pharaoh for his appearance — began to draw nigh, La Madame let fall the blinds so as to temper the full radiance of the day and introduce a note of mystery, all the while bestowing countless good wishes upon poor Debby, whose heart beat with painful violence, who shook like a sere leaf in the wind and trembled

like some cordial set to warm above a blazing fire; whereupon she kissed her on the forehead, gave her hands an affectionate pressure, and made her exit.

Immediately upon being left to herself, Deborah affixed a long black mourning-band to her left arm.

She was suffering the most dreadful agony, half-fainting with apprehension, when of a sudden there came to her ears the squeak of a court-shoe in the passageway and a timid tapping at the door; she hurried to open it, and in walked Pharaoh, arrayed most magnificently in garments that brought to mind the opening of the century and, still more vividly, the radiant era of the gentleman who had loved La Vallière.[1] Upon his person he had a black velvet surcoat bristling with gold braid-work, a waistcoat of figured silk brocade in silver, wide upper-breeches billowing like a tar's canvas slops, and a grey felt hat plumed and girdled by a wide hatband.

The nobility of his face was striking, his deportment was majesty incarnate; bedazzled, quite overcome by so commanding an appearance, and no doubt also by the dizzying awareness that she found herself confronting one of those men whom crime or the legacy of crime renders master over an entire people, Deborah fell upon her knees and lowered her brow to the earth itself; whereupon Pharaoh took hold of her hand and spoke to her, saying:

[1] La Vallière: Louise de la Vallière (1644–1710), the first of Louis XIV's acknowledged mistresses, celebrated for the simplicity and apparent sincerity of her devotion; her era was retrospectively idealised as a more innocent age of royal gallantry.

XL.

What manner of cruel wind am I, that the flowers should bend beneath my presence? Come, my lady, let me raise you, and permit me to restore to your lips all the vagrant kisses that mine, in the sorrow of being parted from you, squandered upon your painted semblance — that effigy which glittered at my heart like some lone star piercing the gloom, and which has melted into nothing now that the radiance of your charms has broken upon me.

"With what feverish longing did I count the hours until I should be yours! With what restless desire did I wish myself free of those wretched diplomatic concerns — dull, insufferably dull — that kept me languishing at the borders when my whole soul had taken wing and settled itself at your feet.

"And now you are before me — I fold you in my embrace; I whisper to you of passion; I am content beyond all measure!

"Yours is a magnanimous temper, my lady, and you comprehend the lengths to which consuming passion can impel a soul; you will absolve me, will you not, of whatever high-handedness I have shown in my behaviour towards you. I have torn you away from society; I made a prisoner of you: the thing is indefensible — utterly indefensible! But what can I do when I love you to distraction? The remainder of my days will be devoted entirely to making amends.

"Doubtless this gloomy residence has proved insufferably tedious to you?"

"I grew weak with waiting. How fervently I hoped you would come!"

"Unworldly thing! But what, pray, is this mourning crape I see about your arm?"

"I wear it for Patrick, my unfortunate husband — my husband, who fell to murder's hand upon the very night preceding my own capture. And by whose hand did he perish? Why, by that of the Marquis de Villepastour, a captain in the King's service — out of spite that I turned him away; and by the royal favourite herself — since my husband would have nothing to do with her! What villainy! Monsieur, I count upon

you to right this wrong. Yes — you shall be my instrument of vengeance!"

"I possess but little power."

"But you speak with the King — surely you will make this known to him!"

"To which His Majesty will reply: 'Let the ladies in question take better care of their attachments, if they wish to keep them. In any case, what's one gone when there are always more to be had? There's nothing I can do. We print bills for a lost dog; for a dead one we hold our peace.' "

"How dare you, monsieur! You traduce the King most shamefully! His Majesty is a righteous judge; he has an honest heart and his speech is that of a noble soul; crime is hateful to the King, and he never fails to punish it."

"It pleases me that you entertain such an advantageous notion of him. Set your mind at rest — satisfaction will be yours. But come, let us banish these unhappy subjects for now: my mind is of a shadowy cast, and even the faintest sombre thought preys upon me and inspires a kind of terror. Gloom is a toxin to the soul, but gladness works like a healing draught.

"Come to me, Deborah, come, my lady — sit yourself down beside me here, and let us converse about matters of the heart.

"Your hands — leave them in my grasp, and let me bring myself nearer still to you.

"All that I sensed in you proves true — you are an angel in human form! You have made me lose all reason! If all the daughters of Ireland were fashioned like you in beauty and in grace, and if the crown of France were mine, I should make swift work of exchanging my whole kingdom for that isle of yours."

"May Providence shield my country from so dire a pestilence as yourself! To bear the yoke of a foreign conqueror, to yield to nothing but the law of might — those are grievous trials! Yet to serve a villain born of one's own nation, or elected by it — why, that is ignominy!"

"Upon my word, my lady, you flatter me excessively by calling me a pestilence; when our acquaintance deepens, I daresay your estimation of me will decline.

"Oh, keep that pose exactly! The way you have your head bent — you are utterly bewitching. Those shoulders of yours — so luminously white, so perfectly formed! Good Lord, I must call upon my entire stock of civilised behaviour to devour them with kisses only! With a pair of shoulders like yours, my pet, the last place you should wish to be cast away is the island of Te Wahipounamu.[1]

"These low-necked frocks amount to positive ambuscades laid for unwary men. Granted, a plunging neckline has its merits, but a bodice one could make disappear would be preferable by far; it would assuredly be a good deal more accommodating. Barriers are not to my taste; however, we are possessed by a fetish for layers and envelopments, and a woman's reputation would suffer terribly if she were not bundled up in cloth as though she were a bandaged sore.

"Not long since, two fine ladies descended from their equipage and passed into the grounds of the Tuileries; they had devised a charming expedient for honouring both custom and common sense: entirely without undergarments, they were attired solely in gowns of gossamer gauze so diaphanous that their shapely figures and fair flesh-tones could be distinctly seen. They appeared much as melons do when glimpsed through protective glass domes — it was exquisite!

"In all my days I have felt nothing comparable to what stirs within me now as I sit near you; it has become plain to me that genuine passion was, until today, completely unknown to my heart. Oh, my lady, if you could imagine what violent passion your artlessness has brought to life in my bosom, and how fierce a flame consumes me as I sit beside you! My mind is losing its moorings... the air will not come... Keep still — remain enclosed in my arms!... Such defiance is silly and serves no purpose. Oh my fair one, let us perish in ecstasy!"

"Stop this instant! In God's name, monsieur! Have you lost all propriety? You conduct yourself in a manner beneath the dignity of the office Heaven has given into your keeping."

"Heaven fashioned me as a man."

"And you reduce yourself to the level of a cur!"

"You show yourself ill-mannered, my pet, and handle the wretched Count de Gonesse most unkindly."

"Spare me! I beg you, spare me, monsieur! I know your true identity — you are no Count de Gonesse. Your Majesty, you are Pharaoh!"

"My dear girl, you are having delusions."

"Your Majesty, let me go! What infamy! You are hurting me dreadfully! You shall have nothing — nothing at all!

"Such, then, is the treatment a woman from another land may expect in your Kingdom! They kill her husband, then haul her off to an unspeakable location and keep her like livestock for His Majesty's amusement, and His Majesty forces himself upon her. Such wickedness defies belief! — Majesty, can you not feel yourself perishing with shame? — Oh, the kings of old were not thus — they did not infect their Empire with moral rot; they led their people with dignity, whereas you, Your Majesty, simply taint and befoul them! Have you no dread that the spirits of Saint Louis,

Robert, or Charlemagne might appear in this very place, emerging from their tombs in tears?"

Pharaoh, however, gave her no hearing whatsoever, but drew her into his arms and pressed her down under him.

"Your Majesty, I beg your pity! Lord above, what makes you hunger so for a miserable, joyless waif like myself? Are not the mothers, sisters, consorts, and daughters of all your courtiers entirely yours for the taking, pursuing you with all the fervour of mares seeking a stallion? Is not the whole Court yours? Is not every woman in the city available to you? Have you not this establishment packed with slave-girls groomed for your gratification, wasting away as they wait their turn, envying me — I am sure of it — because they hear my screams of anguish and imagine them to be exclamations of delight? Ah, Your Majesty! Your Majesty! Spare me! Spare me! — You hunger for voluptuous pleasure — but I am only a bramble-bush, all thorns, from which the bitter winds of ill-fortune have stripped away every leaf and blossom. What am I but a woman from another land, bereft of beauty and persuasive words — wretched, dismal, blighted, my heart choked with poison and repugnance and despair, yearning for the hills of my birth, grieving for my mother whose grave is still freshly turned, and for my husband whose blood is scarcely cold. — Spare me, spare me, Your Majesty! Let me go — you might as well seek gratification from a burial urn,

caresses from the cypress that marks a grave! See for yourself! I am frigid and icy as one already dead! — Pity me! For God's sake, pity! Have some humanity, Your Majesty! There is a child growing inside me — do not make the unborn innocent I bear the son or daughter of a whore!"

"My imperious creature, the love I bear you is an ennobling force — it degrades nothing and no one. Your pride need have no fears — believe me, if either of us makes a sacrifice of dignity, it is surely I and not you. For you have guessed right — I am Pharaoh himself, and I would part with my Kingdom of France without hesitation to rule in your heart instead. No, no — I can bring these two realms under one crown. Accept me for your paramour, and every vision you have harboured of bliss and magnificence shall come to pass. Justice will be done you, vengeance exacted, amends made. Your life now and hereafter will shine with such lustre that all memory of your past will be utterly dimmed. I can accomplish anything whatsoever — this you know? Then understand — you will be mistress of all that power! All things are mine, and all shall belong to you! Fortune, fame, flatterers, minions, celebrations, pageantry, victories, feasts, voluptuous indulgence, pleasure-filled days and orgiastic nights, exotic perfumes, enchanting music, ardent love, delirious abandon! Every delicious, costly, and enviable thing the world can yield will heap itself at your feet; your name will

be proclaimed in every corner of the globe, and the masses will throng about you and break into rapturous applause at the sight of you. — You miss your mountain peaks? Mountains just like them shall be raised up for you. — You sorrow over your ancestral seat? It will be removed bodily and re-erected wherever you merely gesture!"

"Your Majesty, whether the price be a kingdom or a single piece of silver, the degradation is precisely the same. You do me monstrous injury, Your Majesty! Your temptations are swallowed up entirely by my misery — the only things I yearn for are the lonely depths of the woodland or the quiet of the tomb. Your Majesty, I require justice and your royal protection! Your Majesty, it is your duty! Your Majesty, return my liberty to me and save my reputation from ruin!"

"Surrender to me, and I will make you my Queen!"

"And the Queen — your spouse?"

"I have never loved her."

"What about your royal favourite?"

"That passion is quite extinguished."

"And I, Your Majesty, loathe you with all my being."

"Hate stands at love's very threshold."

"Mercy! Mercy, Your Majesty! Spare my person! But how ought I to address you? Could it be that I speak imperfectly?

That my words serve as deceitful go-betweens? Your tongue is not mine — I am but a wretched stranger here. Oh, were you able to understand my mother tongue, I would utter such compassionate and soothing things to you that you would be softened into mercy! Yet you are as ferocious as a deaf brute who batters his victim and hears nothing of her anguished cries."

"Now then, let us have no more of this foolishness. Fighting me is pointless, my love, and only stokes the fire within me. — Keep this up and you will make a brute of me yet!"

"Majesty! To strike and wrench about so helpless a widow, so afflicted a mother — it is contemptible! Have pity! Have pity! I kneel before you, my King! Pity! Pity! Oh, there is no chivalry in you!

"So this is God's earthly vicar! My soul cries out in mutiny and my reason turns upside down. — King, you are beneath contempt! Ruin upon you and your entire house! Unspeakable villainy!"

"Ah, you take on the role of the noble Roman lady! I will make you suffer for it, Lucretia!"[2]

"You are Tarquin himself![3] I shall have my avenger!"

"Who, pray tell?"

"God above and the people below."

END OF VOLUME THE FIRST.

[1] *Te Wahipounamu*: the Māori name for the South Island of New Zealand, meaning "the waters of greenstone"; its appearance here is one of Borel's characteristic Romantic-era gestures toward the remotest and most exotic extremities of the known world.

[2] Lucretia: a Roman noblewoman of the late sixth century BC, celebrated in antiquity for her virtue; her rape by Sextus Tarquinius and subsequent suicide were held to have precipitated the fall of the Roman monarchy.

[3] Tarquin: Sextus Tarquinius, son of the last king of Rome, Tarquinius Superbus; his assault upon Lucretia became the emblematic act of tyrannical violation in classical and later European tradition.

"Lunatic!" Deborah repeated slowly, as she gave forth a most terrible cry.

MADAME PUTIPHAR

PAR

PETRUS BOREL

(LE LYCANTHROPE)

Seconde édition, conforme pour le texte et les vignettes à l'édition de 1839

PRÉFACE PAR M. JULES CLARETIE

TOME SECOND

PARIS

LÉON WILLEM, ÉDITEUR

8, RUE DE VERNEUIL

1878

VOLUME THE SECOND

BOOK THE FOURTH.

I.

The fireplace, a magnificent affair of white marble, swept upward in an arc that mimicked the bow of Amor himself. Madame Putiphar, upon the left, bent over her needlework; Pharaoh, upon the right, oppressed by the most grievous boredom.

He opened his mouth in a great yawn.

The lady yawned in her turn.

A charming unanimity!

"Come, your Majesty, let us see you brighten somewhat. If you mean to be no pleasanter than this, my treasure, not one of my delightful scandalous anecdotes shall you have. — Good gracious! What can have sunk you into so black a

mood? Your appetite at supper was positively wolfish. Have you brought on a fit of indigestion?"

"True enough: I have had a bellyful of this world!"

"If you will lie there like something upon a hearse, I shall fetch my players to sound a requiem in your honour."

"Pray do not; leave my hearing in peace."

"Requiem or no, you shall be treated to certain new Languedocian ariettes by Mondonville[1] — ravishing pieces! Depend upon it, they will distract you from your dolour."

"I repeat myself: none! I will have no music! It is agony to listen to and pitiable to behold — witness these sensible men, these mature beings, who mewl upon different notes as though they were infants torn from the breast, or who saw a length of horsehair back and forth over mutton gut with vast solemnity and agitation, or who thump upon stretched donkey-skin, or puff into a hollow rod."

"Your Majesty, what a bear you have become!

"Speaking of bearishness, has his Grace the Duke d'Ayen shared with you the merry little story that is upon everyone's lips this afternoon? A most astonishing escapade, I assure you. — It is said that last week the two ladies — Madame de Flamarens and Madame de Combalet — turned their discourse to the advantages each possessed in point of physical endowment. One made much of her bosom's

excellence, while the other maintained she was no less admirably provided. The matter provoked a vehement disagreement betwixt the two. To put an end to their contention, they struck a wager and agreed that Messieurs de Brissac, de Chaulnes, de Cucé, and de Rochechouart should serve as judges. The gentlemen were pleased to accept this charge, and the day of judgement was set for the second day thereafter, the venue being Madame de Flamarens's residence. Each of the ladies circulated cards among her intimates, beseeching them to appear at the appointed hour and see her vindicated. Not a soul was wanting when the designated time came. In addition to the four adjudicators, there were present, if the reports are to be credited, a score or so of noblemen, some in holy orders and others not. Bets were made on both sides, after the fashion of the turf, and the terms stipulated that whichever lady proved inferior must treat all present to a splendid feast. The moment arrived; off came the ladies' corsets, and their bosoms were revealed to the admiring audience."

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Amid shouts and protestations, the Countess de Flamarens was pronounced the winner, though the decision

sat ill with the larger portion of the assembly. Your Master of the Wolf-Hounds had attracted five wagers — those gentlemen having been duped by the deceptive power of whalebone — while fifteen had invested their hopes in Madame de Combalet. Report has it that Monseigneur Dillon, Archbishop of Toulouse, found himself three thousand livres the poorer; and that Monseigneur de Jarente, Archbishop of Orléans, seeking to stake six thousand on behalf of the Combalet, was turned away on the grounds that he bet with certain knowledge. The supper came off last night, and those who were there swear it was extravagantly riotous. Madame de Flamarens carried out the appointed duties with admirable poise, whilst Madame de Combalet has counselled her stays to show a stout heart against ill-fortune.

"Come, come, Sire — surely you can manage a smile. Was not the invention of the soup-spoon itself a stroke of divine genius? Upon my word, when it was related to me I was ravished with joy, and I laugh till I cry whenever I think upon it!"

Hereupon Madame Putiphar laughed mockingly, and Pharaoh let forth a dismal sound.

"Darling, pray tell me — have I given you offence? Wherein lies my fault? Tell me, that I may ask your forgiveness."

At which point, Pharaoh stood up carelessly and walked to and fro in a desultory manner.

"Ah! The ruling of a nation — what torture! What infernal misery! What an oppressive thing is this sceptre! I shall snap like a twig."

"Pet, have you forgotten I am here to help you bear the weight of your crown? Can it be that your ministers have universally turned their backs upon you?"

"Charles the Fifth[2] — that shrewd Spaniard! — how right he was to surrender the Empire! Like him, I will lay down my burden!

"Every hour of my existence is embittered. This very night past, my supper-tray was neglected; at breakfast today, I was served the most wretched fare.

"To be a king is a bitter and unforgiving lot in this wicked age! The whole world rises up in mutiny — subjects have vanished, servants are no more. Tell me, where shall I discover reverence or dutiful service?

"The throne is shorn of its mystique, reduced to nothing: today a throne is simply a throne, a King simply a King — no more than that!

"From this day forward, I forbid them to bring me veal at table; it is a slippery, viscous flesh that upsets my constitution.

"Bleak as the present may be, the future alarms me yet more acutely. This pestilent philosophistry has poisoned the minds of the common folk. Everything dares to challenge me! What wretchedness is mine!

"Insult has been done to my person, sacred and beyond all violation. Pompon[3] — you who watch over my reputation with such tender care — see me avenged!"

"An insult to you, Sire! But who dared?"

"Why, nobody of consequence — some chit of a thing, a simpleton, a girl from the Parc, an impudent little baggage!"

"I was sure of it from the first. An Irish lass, am I right?"

"Knowing me for the King, she nevertheless drove me off and damned me to my face."

"The impudent hussy! That bit of dirt in the ground look down upon you? Why, I am positively sweating with fury! And what instructions did you issue to La Madame?"

"That I should turn her out if I were subjected to such an indignity a second time; that she must do a better job of breaking in her girls, and that the shrew in question is to be married off directly with a fat portion to sweeten her temper."

"Sire, the thing is not to be thought of. So bold a woman is a dangerous animal. There can be no question of her

rejoining society; she must be shut up until death in a royal dungeon, and the most impenetrably secret! Trust in me, your Majesty; the stain upon your honour will be washed away."

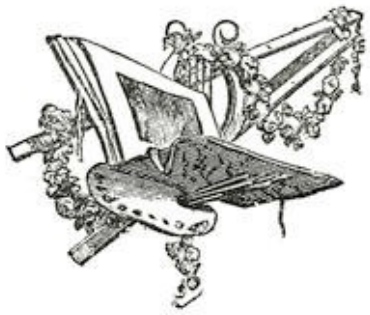
"What prince in history was ever so ill-served by those he ruled?"

"Majesty, recall if you please that this wench is no Frenchwoman. A stranger she is, and utterly uncivilised! The people under your rule are infinitely her betters."

"Merciful heavens! What vexations prey upon a king! What a laborious calling is monarchy in this modern age! The very fact of being alive crushes me; another must shoulder the care of France, for I am sick of her; I am sick of everything, I have no desire to rule, I must lay down my crown!"

"Darling, be easy in your mind; there now, quiet yourself — the brazen hussy shall suffer for her insolence. Put aside all such black imaginings. Pah! It signifies nothing whatever! The king of beasts has felt the nip of a fly! We'll stamp the thing into dust! Come now, Sire, make yourself merry, amuse yourself a little. Will you not brew coffee for us this evening? There now — your marabout[4] and your grinding-mill, and mocha beans of the most agreeable fragrance. Smell this — does it not give off the most delightful aroma?

"Come, my treasure, cease that sullen expression; fan the coals and I shall entertain you with a fresh tale."

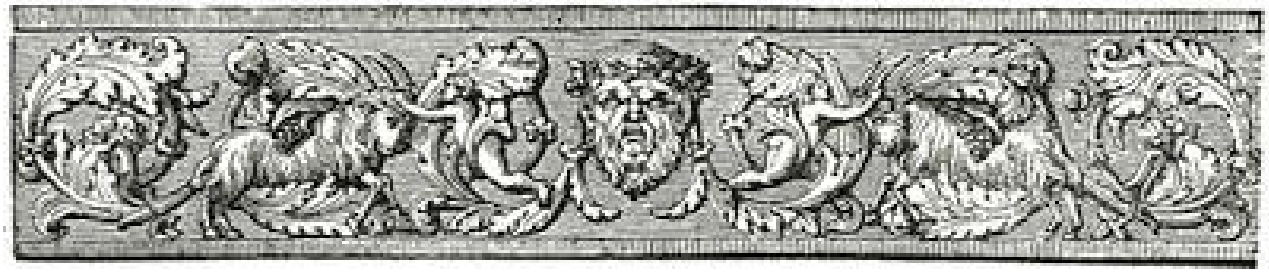


[1] Mondonville: Jean-Joseph Cassanéa de Mondonville (1711–1772), French composer and violinist, a favourite at the court of Louis XV; his *motets* and *pièces de clavecin* were among the most celebrated works performed at Versailles. His Languedocian origins made his *ariettes* in that dialect a novelty much admired at Court.

[2] Charles the Fifth: the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (1500–1558), who abdicated his several crowns in 1555–1556 and retired to the monastery of Yuste in Spain — an act of voluntary renunciation that became legendary in European political thought.

[3] Pompon: one of several pet names by which Louis XV addressed Madame de Pompadour; "Pompon" was among the most familiar. Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour (1721–1764), was his official royal favourite from 1745 until her death, wielding extraordinary influence over appointments, policy, and the arts.

[4] Marabout: a small bulbous coffee-pot of the eighteenth century, with a flat short base designed to be set directly upon a burner; used for brewing rather than roasting. A fine example is held in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (acc. no. 200370).



II.

When morning came, Madame Putiphar had La Madame brought before her, along with the Count Phélipeaux de Saint-Florentin de la Vrillière; what passed between them in conference occupied no little time, but the matter was at last decided: Lady Deborah was to be conveyed to the fort at Sainte-Marguerite.[1]

No sooner had Pharaoh quitted Deborah than, maddened by his ill fortune, he turned upon La Madame with the most vehement censure for having so ill prepared her pupil.

"Sire, I implore your forgiveness," she pleaded again and again, her arms about his knees. "I am as much her victim as you are. She is a deceitful wretch; she has made a dupe of me. She is a rank hypocrite! Sire, such a thing will not occur again. Oh! the strumpet — she'll pay dearly for this!"

Directly he was gone, she made her way to Deborah, and although the young woman was lying senseless on the floorboards, she assailed her with a torrent of insults, shaking her roughly in an attempt to bring her round. The head fell slack under its own heaviness, beating dully upon the floor — that deadened sound peculiar to a skull colliding with unyielding matter.

In the midst of all this, Monsieur de Cervière came hurrying up, the memory of his fruitless siege and its attendant shame still weighing upon his spirits. He threw in with La Madame's vituperation some choice profanities from the soldiery, then dragged Deborah from the ground and, striking her with his stick, forced her to remain standing though she could scarce support herself. When the worst of their fury had passed, they tore the handsome garments from her and bore her off to shut her in a vault used as a gaol — a cheerless hole that received no illumination save the dim rays struggling through the spider-webs across the grating, and offered no better resting-place than what straw and hay lay strewn upon the ground.

Several days had passed with Deborah wasting away in the cellar, quite alone and without the smallest hope of getting out — her rations were tossed in through a peephole — when, one morning at a very early hour, she started awake at the noise of approaching steps and speech. Where the

planks of the door met imperfectly, she caught sight of a fairly strong light projecting luminous spots and shimmering lines upon the blackened walls about her. These spectral fires waxed and waned and danced from the floor to the arched roof above, sweeping across her form and streaking her with bands of flame. Fright took hold of her; she made herself small, thrust her face down into the straw, and gave her soul into God's keeping as though she were about to breathe her last. The door burst open of a sudden, and Monsieur de Cervière stepped in holding a lantern aloft, La Madame and a handful of attendants at his heels; he prodded her with his boot and said sharply: "Up with you, my lady, and follow me."

Upon hearing the Kizlar-Agha's voice, Deborah tried to raise herself to her knees; but she lacked the vigour to do so — her legs having grown quite numb on the clammy ground — and she sank down again with a thud.

At a word from Monsieur de Cervière, two domestics picked her up between them and bore her out to a carriage waiting at the outer portal of the Seraglio.

Lifting her lids partway, Deborah caught sight of a pair of armed men who grasped her by the arms and secured them at her back. An icy blast swept through; with scarcely any covering, Deborah shuddered like a newborn lamb; she asked if she might have some clothes. The reply came: "The sun will warm you well enough." The carriage door closed

upon her, the whip went off like the snapping of dry pods, the horses set their bells jangling and launched into a gallop.

To find herself in the dead of night, hurled into a carriage with two men of menacing aspect — vulgar, unpleasant, and sly-looking, with faces seemingly fashioned for the police service or the prison-ship — filled Deborah with profound terror, and the icy hand of fear stole into her very entrails.

Being resolved against any intercourse with her captors, she posed them no questions whatsoever, and even when they essayed to speak with her she made a show of not comprehending and responded only in Irish. All her caution availed her nothing; these brutes, whose hearts matched their faces and their trade in baseness, had scarcely been alone with her any time at all ere they commenced plying her with indecent speech and impertinences, which by degrees grew insulting. They made her sit by force betwixt them both; and there, like Susannah caught between the two elders,[2] wretched Deborah had to endure their obscene chatter, their kisses, and their groping hands.

More than a week of anguish and humiliation, of freezing and famine and sleepless nights; a journey across nearly the whole length of France — and then at last she arrived at Antibes, ἀντίπολις, ἀντίβιος,[3] that ancient Marseillaise settlement planted at the very tip of Provence, at

the base of the Maritime Alps, on the handsome shoreline of the Ligurian Sea.

With utmost urgency the carriage traversed the town and headed for the coast. The harbour-master, upon merely seeing their credentials, furnished our two officers with some rowers and a small craft, wherein Deborah was forced to take her seat. Seeing the shores of Provence withdraw into the distance, a lively dread came upon her: she had no means of understanding what would become of her at last. As it seemed improbable that in a vessel so fragile and lacking any stores, they could undertake a journey of sufficient length to transport her to a foreign shore, the thought came naturally to her mind that she was to be drowned at sea. In a spirit of resignation she waited tranquilly for what must come, her gaze measuring out the vast shroud of waters; yet when they had passed over the Gulf of Juan and gained the promontory of Croisette, suddenly her fate was made plain: there confronting her was a fortress that thrust upward from a nest of verdure and cut a sharp silhouette against the celestial blue. The boat made straight for the place; ere long it reached the fortress base, entering a little bay where a handful of coral fishermen's craft lay at their moorings.

At this point they went ashore. Down came the drawbridge, the two police agents were admitted to see the governor, and a gaoler lost no time in leading Deborah away

to a dungeon that awaited her as a hungry maw awaits its food.

A den of unadorned stone — that was all it was. In a corner there was a pallet, on the pallet a bag of straw and a woollen blanket of an ochre hue, pierced through like a colander. In a second corner there languished, quite abjectly, a table with gnarled legs and two wooden chairs that put one in mind of salt-bins. Worm-eaten and decrepit, this furniture was collapsing from decay, and if one so much as jostled it, it scattered a pale yellow powder round about, as though from corn stamens. High up there was a little window, secured with a casement and iron gratings, affording but dim light to this horrible den: Deborah hauled the table just below it and climbed onto it to see where this light was coming from.

It was a view that plunged far away; it possessed grandeur, but of a cheerless sort; one beheld nothing save a doubling of sky and sea, since the sky mirrors the sea, since the sea mirrors the sky.

[1] *Sainte-Marguerite*: the largest of the Lérins Islands, lying roughly half a mile offshore from Cannes in the Bay of Cannes. Its fortress prison, the Fort Royal, is most celebrated as the place of confinement of the so-called Man in the Iron Mask, held there from 1687 to 1698.

[2] *Susannah and the two elders*: a narrative from the Book of Daniel (in the deuterocanonical tradition) in which the virtuous Susannah is spied upon and falsely accused by two corrupt elders who seek to coerce her; she is ultimately vindicated through the intervention of the young Daniel. The story was a widely recognised emblem of female innocence besieged by corrupt male authority.

[3] *Antibes*, ἀντίπολις, ἀντίβιος: Borel derives the name from the Greek, suggesting "the city opposite" (*ἀντίπολις*) and "the life set against" or "the opposing existence" (*ἀντίβιος*) — a characteristically Romantic philological flourish that casts the town as a threshold between the known world and exile.

III.

The governor, arriving to see Deborah on the following day, came upon her as she leant against her table in a posture of dejection, weeping without restraint. Saluting her in the most gentlemanly fashion, he addressed her:

"You must not surrender yourself to such sorrow — no harm shall come to you here."

"Should you see me weep, monsieur," she answered, "know that I mourn what has already befallen me, not what is or what may yet come to pass; pain in too great measure has made me impervious to further feeling — wretchedness has become to me what a particular climate is to those born beneath it, and holds no further power over my spirit."

"My lady, I present myself before you that you might make known to me anything of which you stand in need. Do not scruple to request anything — I shall see to it that every reasonable demand is satisfied."

"I stand in need of nothing whatsoever, monsieur."

"Yet, fair madam, you lack for all things."

"Indeed, monsieur, you are right."

He thereupon made bold to take a chair, and when he had delivered a considerable address meant to console her spirits, went on to say:

"Let not the lively interest I take in you cause you any uneasiness, my lady: it is my way to love all who are placed under my keeping. Pray regard me not as a gaoler, but as a kindly host within these castle walls. Although the King has given me my family, as it were, I feel towards them no less tenderly than a father would. I attach considerable importance, my lady, to your not declining my solicitude, and to your according me both your confidence and your goodwill — these I shall attempt to merit by every means in my power. Here upon this barren isle, in this fortress, unmarried and childless as I am, I have no bonds anchoring me to life beyond the devotion of those hapless creatures committed to my charge. All the happiness I know is found in this: to cast a measure of peace and satisfaction about me wherever I may. Nothing gladdens my heart more keenly than to see myself cherished by souls who, in the natural course of things, would hate me utterly. This shows us that any situation in life, no matter what it may be, is capable of being rendered noble and holy. His Majesty appointed me a common turnkey; so be it! With the Almighty's help I have donned the grandest mantle

of all — that of a father to my flock. Now and then, in fits of self-satisfaction, I allow myself to think: might I not be a lowly tool of Divine Purpose, set here by Providence to mend a little of the damage wrought by those beyond these walls.

"I confess, my lady, that you stir my heart profoundly; so young you are, and fair... Let it not distress you — these words are harmless from my lips, the lips of an aged wretch whose days are nearly spent. Your sex and your misfortunes would be enough — but you are Irish besides, and that endears you to me especially. For the sons and daughters of Ireland, my lady, I cherish the most elevated respect. I was once in the service of the Earl of Thomond[1] — today he is Marshal of France, a Knight of the Order of the Holy Spirit, and holds command in Languedoc. His memory alone suffices to fill my eyes with tears born of gratitude and awe. His goodness to me was boundless — I am overwhelmed by the debt! Heaven be praised for bringing you into my sphere — it may be that through you I can repay a little of what I owe him in kindness, in courtesy, in liberality. I flatter myself with this consoling hope — be so kind as not to rob me of it."

Deborah thanked him most affably, saying that inasmuch as men had given her but little occasion for gratitude thus far, her heart remained wholly at her own disposal; he might

therefore gain it without difficulty, and possess it large and entire, sharing it with none.

"If you would not think it an unreasonable thing to ask, my lady, I would request that you make known to me the cause of your incarceration, which remains wholly unaccounted for in the warrant under which you are held. Yet if there be the least sadness in it for you, I entreat you to leave it unspoken."

"Since I am as desirous of your esteem as I am of your pity, permit me, monsieur, to take the story back to its very beginning. It would ill become me to leave you with merely half the truth about my person. I mean to expose to you the full record of my life, assured that I shall not seem less deserving of your good opinion once you know the truth. Friendship is of a finer nature than love: it does not offer itself blindly to the unknown, nor can it flourish without mutual understanding. Before the Almighty and upon my unborn child, I give you my solemn oath that truth alone shall be spoken here. Have faith in me, monsieur."

She then proceeded to narrate her life's story to him in its entirety, employing the most artless manner.

As the tale unfolded, they stopped more than once, the pair of them overcome with tears, and at its conclusion Deborah was deprived entirely of her senses. When the spell

had passed and she was herself again, the governor offered her the truest and most heartfelt words of solace, and once more pledged his benevolent regard.

"Put it from your mind that you are confined here," he told her. "I shall never be the one to call it to your attention. Your life here can be one of peace, quietude, and ease. Freedom is yours within this place — the same freedom enjoyed by the winged creatures that nest in these battlements. In our earthly existence, are we not all of us held captive by one thing or another? Whether here or yonder — of what consequence is it? Even the eagle must have his eyrie; the bear must have his lair, must he not? There are ten million Frenchmen, nominally at liberty, who enter the world, spend their days, and breathe their last without ever setting foot beyond the threshold of their natal cottage. It is not the King's sealed orders that fill the prisons of this world — it is rather the claims of family, the chains of poverty, wage slavery, the burdens of home, slothfulness, and the tyranny of convention.

"Nowhere could you find, my lady, a grander or more picturesque castle, a more enchanting isle, or a more glorious sea spread out beneath a more immaculate heaven."

"Monsieur, I marvel at the resources of your wit. It would seem you are within a hair's breadth of demonstrating that prisoners alone are truly free. This puts me in mind of

something Horace Walpole[2] wrote to a friend, with precisely your degree of cleverness, monsieur, and just as much overstatement:

"'For a long while now I have been of the opinion that those wandering free who ought to be in Bedlam are so vastly numerous, the most expedient solution would be to shut away the small remnant of people still possessed of their wits — who would thus be kept from harm — and to allow all the others perfect liberty.'

"But I would know, monsieur, if you are able to tell me — for what period am I doomed to enjoy freedom in this bastille?"

"Madame... for life."

"For life?... How men contrive to make their cruelty ridiculous! They pronounce judgement on what is yet to come as if they owned all futurity. For life!... as if one might not twist one's chains into a noose or beat one's brains out on the flagstones. For life!... As the judge enunciates this very word, the wretch at the bar, moving his hand stealthily to his bosom, could thrust a knife through his heart and give up the ghost ere the final sound has left the judge's lips. For life!... Only the human creature can contrive to be at once a fool and a brute!"

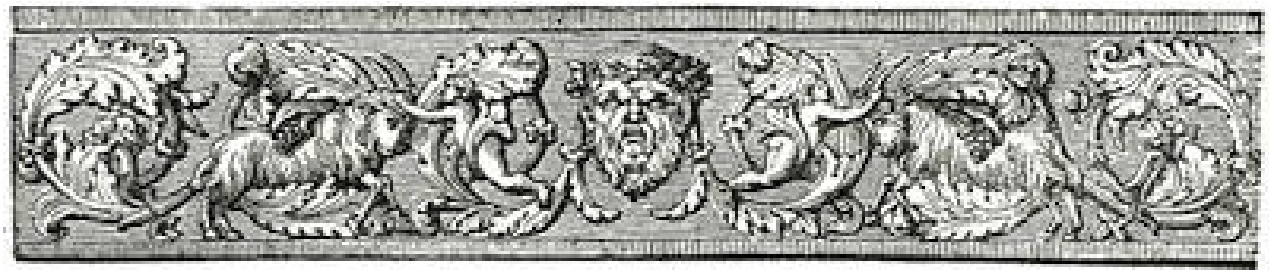
The governor sought to pacify Deborah by giving her the consoling expectation that at Putiphar's death she would without question recover her liberty.

"Slavery, you mean to say," she responded, a smile playing upon her lips. "You have let slip the truth, monsieur; truth inevitably finds her way up from the depths — no cover can keep her down."

The governor, answering smile with smile, squeezed her hands affectionately and took his leave.

[1] *Earl of Thomond*: the O'Brien Earls of Thomond were an ancient Irish noble family; by the eighteenth century several of their line had followed the Jacobite diaspora to France, where they served with distinction in the Irish Brigade of the French army. The reference here evokes the broader world of the *Wild Geese* — Irish Catholic exiles who entered Continental military service after the Williamite wars.

[2] Horace Walpole (1717–1797): English writer, art historian, and prolific letter-writer, son of the Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole; his correspondence, widely circulated and celebrated in literary circles, was a byword for wit, elegance, and oblique social commentary.



IV.

Shortly afterwards there came a jailer who presented her, by order of His Excellency the Governor, with a basket filled with figs and oranges picked fresh that morning; thereafter he fetched for her a mattress with linens, a looking-glass, a well-appointed writing-set, certain small conveniences proper to a lady's toilette, perfumes brought from Grasse,[1] and a number of bergamot sweetmeat boxes.

Thus you stand where Deborah stood: newly acquainted with the Governor of Sainte-Marguerite, and doubtless moved, no less than she, by the generous civility of his conduct. I need scarcely labour further to round out your picture of him: where there is no duplicity in a man, his true nature shows itself unbidden. You need not fear that I shall lead you, hand in hand, into the maze-like convolutions of his inward self; we shall not go astray seeking out what murky emotions may lurk within.

This officer in the King's service was called, if I am not mistaken, Monsieur de Cogolin, and despite having reached some sixty-five years of age, he was still a man of lively temper and vigorous constitution. At first glance there was something odd about him — a ginger-hued peruke crowning a face of distinctly greenish pallor. But for two great eyes of jet, dancing with animation, his countenance would have been altogether plain: fleshy, round, and in itself somewhat undistinguished. At bottom, his was a nature compounded of high spirits and an airy want of concern. Sound wit he had, and wit of the sparkling sort as well; culture, extensive acquaintance with good company, and elegant civility were his — save that sometimes, in unguarded moments, there emerged something of that brusque directness which marks every son of Provence. Goodness of heart was no mere show with him: he expended all his care upon easing the burden of those wretched prisoners placed under his authority. His rod of office they never felt as such, though how tempting it is for men in his position to convert the sceptre into a club. Everything that might force upon them the consciousness of captivity he strove to keep at a distance, and he saw to it that they enjoyed all such pleasures as the nature of the fortress and his personal wealth could supply. He provided them with pastimes, news-sheets, and reading matter; his garden and the whole extent of the fortress were theirs for walking; and

many a time he conducted them out on the open water to fish, sailing as far afield as the coast of Asinara.[2]

Small wonder, then, that every prisoner and every soul dwelling in the fortress loved him truly, and bore towards him a respect and affection that would have seemed, to strangers ignorant of his benefactions, nothing short of idolatry.

As a young man he had been greatly devoted to the fair sex — devoted, it may be, to excess — and it was through his dealings with them that he had come by the gentle address and refined demeanour that marked him out from other men. From that history his eyes had kept their tender cast, his voice its honeyed inflection, and his every gesture a kind of lingering softness. Passion had ripened in his breast into something like adoration, and he accorded to the fair sex a devotion worthy of the terms *dulia* and *hyperdulia*.[3] However — and this was a source of considerable grief to him — his tenure as Governor of Sainte-Marguerite had left him altogether bereft of feminine company. He saw in this denial the hand of Providence, exacting atonement for the faults he had once committed in his dealings with the fair sex. Still, in an effort to lighten his sorrow, he peopled his world with all manner of things capable of summoning up tender associations and satisfying his adoration. Brantôme,[4] Bussy-Rabutin,[5] and Madame de Sévigné[6] were the authors he loved best — with Voltaire, of course, as his constant companion

and staple fare. About his apartment were ranged portraits of women from times past and present, each notable either for her talents or her beauty. In the midst of his sitting-room, atop a pedestal of richly veined portoro,[7] there rose a marble likeness of Ninon de Lenclos,[8] which he adorned daily with a coronet of flowers plucked fresh that morning with his own fingers. Later, however, after Deborah had claimed the whole of his heart and shaken the foundations of his private worship, Ninon was now and then overlooked, and occasionally went about for days wearing a wreath of wilted blooms.

[1] *Grasse*: a town in the hills above Cannes, long the centre of the French perfume industry; its proximity to Sainte-Marguerite makes the governor's gift a pointed local courtesy.

[2] *Asinara*: a large island off the north-western tip of Sardinia; its appearance here suggests the governor's fishing expeditions ranged considerably along the Ligurian and Tyrrhenian coasts.

[3] *Dulia and hyperdulia*: theological terms from scholastic Catholic tradition; *dulia* denotes the veneration properly accorded to saints, *hyperdulia* the higher veneration due to the Virgin Mary alone. The governor applies them here with mock-devotional wit to his worship of women.

[4] Brantôme: Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme (c. 1540–1614), French soldier and memoirist, best known for his *Vies des dames galantes*, a collection of licentious anecdotes about women of the court; a natural choice for a man of the governor's temperament.

[5] Bussy-Rabutin: Roger de Rabutin, Comte de Bussy (1618–1693), French soldier and writer, cousin of Madame de Sévigné; his *Histoire amoureuse des Gaules*, a scandalous roman à

clef of court intrigues, earned him exile and imprisonment in the Bastille.

[6] Madame de Sévigné: Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné (1626–1696), celebrated for her *Lettres*, a vast correspondence with her daughter that became one of the masterworks of French prose; her pairing here with Brantôme and Bussy-Rabutin — her own cousin — is quietly comic.

[7] *Portoro*: a rich black marble veined with gold and white, quarried near La Spezia on the Ligurian coast; much prized in eighteenth-century decorative arts.

[8] Ninon de Lenclos: Anne "Ninon" de l'Enclos (1620–1705), celebrated Parisian courtesan, freethinker, and wit, whose salon attracted the leading intellectual and literary figures of her age; she became in the following century an emblem of liberated intelligence and sensual freedom.

V.

Shortly after his initial visit, M. de Cogolin made Deborah an offer: if she felt any curiosity to know something of her present dwelling-place and its surrounding country, he would gladly conduct her on a tour of the island, acting as guide and expositor — a *cicerone*, as they say in Rome. To this she gave her cheerful agreement.

They made their way first to the loftiest point of the fortress, its topmost platform.

When she had long cast her eyes over the scene, Deborah said to M. de Cogolin: "I am now acquainted with what lies around me — but may I know where I am?"

"My lady, there is naught mysterious in it. I should have made haste to tell you at once that we stand upon the island of Sainte-Marguerite, had I but thought you ignorant of the fact. The smaller island you see southward, cut off from this one only by a strait of no great width, is Saint-Honorat,

whither I shall take the greatest pleasure in escorting you, should you wish it. Those two little islands you see quite nearby are known as La Fornigue and La Grenille — neither is cultivated, and neither shelters any dwelling."

Next they came down from the heights and explored the fortress within, examining every particular. Upon entering the cell that had long ago been the dwelling-place of the Man in the Iron Mask,[1] Deborah experienced an emotion too powerful to be suppressed.

In time of peace the fortress was garrisoned by nothing more than some hundreds of disabled veterans. One saw these ruins of men sunning themselves on every stair, upon every parapet and terrace, and all along the strand.

"What purpose do these old campaigners serve here?" Deborah asked.

"Why, madame," answered M. de Cogolin, "they do precisely what every man does — nothing whatsoever! And they wait for what each of us must wait for — the end!"

Thereupon the Governor asked Deborah if she would care to stroll in his garden, which was the one place on the island not suffered to run to waste; and by and by they found themselves seated in the shade of an evergreen oak, where the Governor chatted as he pulled apart a pomegranate and savoured its seeds.

"This island was called Lerinus in antiquity, and the other — Saint-Honorat — was Lerina. Whence came these names? That, my lady, I cannot tell you, nor do I wish to discover it — for I pride myself on being learned, and by remaining ignorant on this point I stand on equal footing with Strabo, Pliny, Bouche, and Moréri.[2]

"Mark how, by a singular whim of human fickleness, these islands have undergone a change of sex — Lerina turning into Saint-Honorat, and Lerinus becoming Sainte-Marguerite, that virgin martyr.[3] This last island remained in the possession of the monks from the other until the year 1611, at which time Claude de Lorraine, Duke of Chevreuse and their abbot, caused them to surrender it — though I have quite forgotten why.

"Long ago, Cardinal Richelieu ordered the whole coastline of Provence to be placed in a defensive condition, being fearful of an incursion from Spain. But it availed nothing — the Spaniards became masters of the islands regardless, and fortified them as extensively as their tenure there gave them opportunity to do. Upon this isle, which extends no more than two-thirds of a league in its length and but a quarter-league in width, they erected five forts, and in a little while we shall have sight of what is left of them. On the island of Saint-Honorat — no more than a quarter-league long and six hundred paces or so in width, yet once an earthly

Paradise for the delicacy and rareness of its flowers, grape-vines, and kitchen-gardens, just as it had been Paradise in sanctity aforetime — they turned the five chapels scattered about the place into military strongholds: the Trinity, Saint-Cyprian and Justine, Saint-Michael, Saint-Saviour, and Saint-Caprais were all converted into forts and ramparts. These they packed full of soil on the inside, raised embankments around them on the outside, and upon each they set two pieces of ordnance."

M. de Cogolin was finishing his compressed historical account — to which Deborah had listened with indifference — when they passed from the garden and began to skirt the shoreline in the direction of the Gulf of Juan, where they found the humblest of the Spanish fortifications, called the Fortin, in an advanced state of decay. Advancing into the heart of the island, they met with the broken walls of Fort Monterey, where they tarried for an instant or two. Next they made their way westward through thickets of pine, phillyrea, heath, daphne, lentisk, rosemary, and alaternus, and over wastes covered with thyme, rock-rose, cassidony, dwarf heath, and lavender — all the wild growth that clothed the untilled soil — to inspect the Baliguier Tower and the fortification known as Aragon.

"The fifth Spanish stronghold, mind you, and the most imposing," M. de Cogolin now observed, "was the Fort-Réal,

which our French have since maintained and improved upon — and that, my lady, is the very citadel beneath whose roof we stand. The idea of establishing prisons for enemies of the State came from M. de Saint-Marc,[4] who governed this fortress before taking charge of the Bastille, and he gained the necessary authority to carry it out. These are the safest prisons in all France."

"I should never have thought," said Deborah, taking up the thread again, "that beneath so fair a sky there could exist a place so dismal. Should you not say that every painful thing on earth has come together here? Land lying flat and forsaken, yielding nothing, running wild; plants such as one finds in churchyards, drab as the dirt that gives them life; debris and decay at every turn attesting to men's murderous passions and the relentless tyranny of Time; a military stronghold and aged, disfigured men; a gaol complete with warders, irons, confined wretches, and their moaning. Can one call it anything but the Isle of Despair? But this wretchedness speaks to me — it is the reflection of my soul's own waste."

"My lady, I tremble to hear you speak so!"

"Here my soul is at ease."

"Surely a soft, sheltered vale would be worthier of you, my gentle dove."

"Alas! Men have turned the dove into a prowling bird of the darkness."

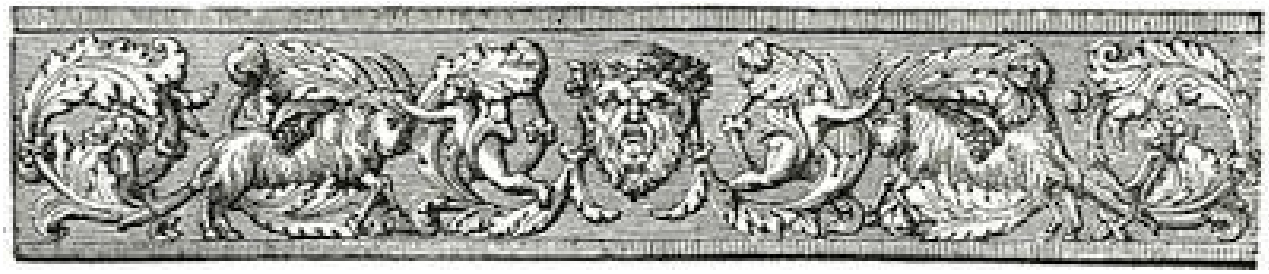
[1] *The Man in the Iron Mask*: a prisoner held at Sainte-Marguerite from 1687 to 1698, whose identity was concealed behind an iron — or, according to some accounts, velvet — mask; he was subsequently transferred to the Bastille, where he died in 1703. His true identity remains disputed, though numerous candidates have been proposed.

[2] *Strabo, Pliny, Bouche, and Moréri*: a characteristic blend of ancient and modern authorities. Strabo (c. 64 BC–AD 24) and Pliny the Elder (AD 23–79) are the great Greek and Roman geographical encyclopaedists; Charles-François Bouche (1737–1795) was a historian of Provence; Louis Moréri (1643–1680) compiled the *Grand Dictionnaire historique*, a standard French reference work of the period.

[3] *Sainte Marguerite:* Saint Margaret of Antioch, a virgin martyr of the early Christian era whose veneration was widespread in the Western Church; she was invoked as a patron of childbirth, a detail not without resonance given Deborah's condition.

[4] M. de Saint-Marc: Bénigne Dauvergne de Saint-Mars (1626–1708), the jailer who had charge of the Man in the Iron Mask

at several successive prisons, including Sainte-Marguerite and finally the Bastille, of which he became governor in 1698.



VI.

Near where the old Logis-aux-Chevaux once stood, they discovered a boatman in readiness, who straightaway bore them across the Frioul — a strip of sea, no more than a quarter of a league from shore to shore, flowing between the two islands of Sainte-Marguerite and Saint-Honorat. Awaiting them on the other side was a lone Benedictine, walking in contemplation, who now advanced and, with the politeness of a gentleman, gave his hand to Deborah to help her alight from the barque. M. de Cogolin made his salutations and informed him that he had brought this lady from abroad to see the Abbey, whereupon the pious brother requested permission to serve as their guide. He took them to the chapel of Saint-Capraise first, standing as it does upon the westernmost promontory, and from there to a succession of shrines — Saint-Sauveur, Saint-Michel, Saint-Cyprien-and-Justine — dotted about the northern coastline, each one gazing downward at its reflection

in the Frioul. Continuing a short distance towards the east, they reached the Trinity chapel.

The stark disparity between two such proximate islands impressed itself forcibly upon Deborah's mind — one wholly forsaken, the other in such blooming health. This island was astir with movement, fairly teeming with vitality. The faithful could be seen making their way from chapel to chapel in prayer. Wherever one looked — among the vines, beneath the fruit-trees, in field or meadow or garden-close — monks and common workmen alike were busy at their occupations. The even soil was traversed by stately walks of lofty trees, while little woods and perfumed thickets scattered here and there provided welcome variety to what might otherwise have been featureless. The green sward was embroidered with plants and blossoms of extraordinary rarity and refinement, a sight to charm any observer. The air itself, unsullied and fragrant, seemed to court the senses. Each footfall that set the herbage stirring sent up little clouds of fragrance, rising heavenward as though from a thurifer's flame. Having never before beheld anything save the plant-life of northern climes, Deborah found herself transported with wonder at the exotic profusion now spread before her. Her progress took her from trunk to trunk and from one green thing to another, and at each she would stop — would look closely, would bend to catch the fragrance, would break off a piece to examine or

taste — enquiring all the while, with the eagerness of a child, what name belonged to this plant or that.

"Why, those are caper-bushes," said the Benedictine, quite gratified at this chance to parade his erudition, "the ones you see running over the soil and climbing the stonework. Our Provençal folk keep the old Greek word *tapenos* for them, which comes from *ταπεινός*[1] — low-lying, humble, or of creeping habit, as you observe. — This is lentisk, and that terebinth — from both flows a gummy resin, and upon their stems one grafts the pistachio-tree, for they are all of one botanical kind.

"Down by the water's edge you'll find myrtle — the Saint-Tropez coastline is thick with it — and beside it this fine Barba-Jovis[2] with leaves like burnished silver. Now this here is elæagnus — the Turks call it *chalef*, while in these parts it goes by the name of muscat willow. This is Saint-Domingo cassia, quite as sensitive to cold as it is perfumed — much coveted by the Grasse perfumers for their scented oils. You see here the agnus-castus,[3] the name of which repeats itself unnecessarily, and which ignorant people compound the folly by terming a pepper-tree. Ah, now! That peculiar growth which has so startled you is none other than the aloe — *aloe folio in oblongum aculeum abeunte*.[4] Its blooming is a great curiosity, though witnessed but seldom; they say it flowers only each hundredth year, yet by some mysterious working of

nature the stem will rise to thirty feet almost overnight and send out branches tipped with blossom-clusters. What surpasses all else in wonder, though, is this: that the stem's appearance is heralded by a detonation precisely like some fierce peal of thunder or a piece of ordnance going off."

Upon hearing this, M. de Cogolin let out so prodigious a laugh that her ladyship fairly leapt in alarm, half-convinced for one moment that an aloe had just exploded into growth beside them.

"Monsieur le Gouverneur, your mirth is ungodly," said the religious gravely. "What thing exists that God cannot accomplish? Is it not a sorry sight when human impotence seeks to confine the omnipotence of the Maker?"

And with unruffled calm he proceeded with his botanical recital and learned commentary.

"What you see here, madame, is the amelanchier, *mespilus folio rotundiore fructu nigro* — it should on no account be confused with *mespilus folio rotundiore fructu rubro*, nor yet with *mespilus folio oblongo serrato*. Yonder is *ilex aculeata cocciglandifera*, a variety of evergreen oak from which one harvests the kermes insect, used for scarlet dye. Now here we have the camphor-weed, a most effective remedy for wounds, and the carthamus from Egypt, source of that vegetable paint wherewith women mad with bodily vanity profane the faces fashioned after the

Divine image. Here you see jasmine of Arabia, and here sumach, seaberry, the malodorous wood, mahaleb, and what we call the nettle-tree. On your knees, if you please, madame, and touch not that venerable bush — the argalou it is, *arnavéou* in our Provençal speech, *paliurus* to the learned. It has the look of a jujube-tree in habit and flowering, but see there — its trunk bristles with thorns of two separate kinds. In the country surrounding Jerusalem it grows in great profusion, and from it was made, during the Passion, that holy crown of thorns which the Jews forced down upon our Lord's brow. Last of all, this is the azedarach, a tree from Syria, the Arabic name of which we have retained. From it come those greyish, hard, glossy seeds, of a leathery texture, they call the tears of Job — capital for fashioning into rosary-beads. Notice the loveliness of its leafage; the flowers, which form themselves into bunches, exhale a most agreeable scent. It is raised in every warm climate upon the face of the earth. The Americans have named it the Pride of India."

As they walked towards the monastery's tower, they encountered three buildings grouped closely together — the chapel of Our Lady, the principal church of Saint-Honorat, and the chapel dedicated to Saint-Porcaire.

The Benedictine, now laying his plant-lore to one side, told Deborah: "From Ascension to Whitsun there arrives here an enormous gathering of the pious, who come to make the

round of these seven chapels and thereby obtain those indulgences which the Holy Pontiffs have accorded — the same indulgences to be had in Rome by visiting the seven principal basilicas."

He next brought her between the Our Lady's chapel and what remained of Saint Peter's chapel, wishing to show her a wonder-working well cut into the living rock, its water most pellucid and admirable for drinking. He insisted that in this well there was at all times precisely three buckets' worth of water — and though one might draw off ever so much, the level would never fall beneath that quantity.

Whereupon the Governor smiled and took the opportunity to tease the good brother somewhat: "Your miracle may be curious," he observed, "but it is scarcely singular — it has a touch of kinship with the Wandering Jew's inexhaustible five sous."[5]

Making no reply to this sally, Dom Fiacre continued by reading out, in loud and emphatic tones, an inscription of great antiquity that had been engraved upon a slab of marble and mounted high on a wall that stood close by the well:

Isacidûm ductor lymphas medicavit amaras, Et virgâ fontes extudit è silice. Aspice, ut hic rigido surgunt è marmore rivi, Et

falso dulcis gurgite vena fluit; Pulsat Honoratus rupem laticesque redundant, Et sudis ad virgæ Mosis adæquat opus.

[The shepherd of the Lerinians cured the bitter streams, striking springs from the stony rock with his rod. Observe how here from stubborn marble brooks arise, and sweet the current flows where once ran bitter; Honoratus strikes the rock-face and forth the waters stream, his staff performing what the rod of Moses did.]

"No doubt madame has no knowledge of Latin?... The poet here compares Saint Honorat to Moses, on account of his having struck water from a rock and rendered wholesome what were once bitter waters. *Lymphas medicavit amaras!*... Saint Honorat, too, drove out from the island all the venomous beasts that had made of it a wilderness...."

"Drive out venomous beasts to make room for monks! God's truth, Reverend Father," exclaimed M. de Cogolin, "that is what I call jumping from bad to worse, from fever into burning fits, or escaping Charybdis only to founder upon Scylla!"

"And there it was that he founded our abbey — the first, mark you, in all the Western lands. The fame of his holiness rapidly took wing, drawing hermits in such numbers from the farthest countries that the island soon rivalled in population

the very deserts of the Thebaid.[6] When Saint Amand held the abbacy, the hermits dwelling there exceeded three thousand in number.

"The foundation of this celebrated monastery by Saint Honorat took place, madame, in or around the year 375."

"Forgive me, reverend father, but Baillet[7] establishes quite plainly that it occurred no earlier than the year 391; Tillemont[8] maintains it was 401, whilst the abbé Expilly[9] insists upon 410. But what of it! Faith I have in such measure, my reverend Dom, that I may bestow it upon these four dates alike, and assure you most confidently that an ample supply shall yet remain for my own use. One thing more strikes me even as I speak: Bouche declares somewhere — I cannot precisely say where — that Saint Honorat first saw light in the year 425. It would follow from his reckoning, therefore, that the holy man founded your monastery half a century or so in advance of his own birth — a view I consider altogether the most judicious, and one I am swift to make my own."

"My dear Governor," Dom Fiacre then remarked, with a look of penetrating earnestness, "I observe with no small distress that the philosophical plague has worked its corruption upon you. Your cup of Voltaire has been drained to the dregs; you reek of the Encyclopédie.[10] Heed me well: grasp your reason firmly, lest it escape you; the very soul of France is caught up in bacchanalian frenzy. If you will not be

still on my account, then let it be for the lady — say no more! May Providence shield you from turning yourself into a fount of impiety and offence."

As they emerged from the church of the Holy Trinity, they turned their steps toward a lofty and substantial tower erected on the rock, the stones of which were shaped to diamond points, and the entrance set towards the North.

"Why, is that indeed your abbey?" asked Deborah of Dom Fiacre. "In all honesty, I should never have imagined it; the tower has not the least suggestion of anything abbatial about it."

"Abbatial it was never meant to be — this jewel of the Christian realm. Its foundations were laid in the tenth century, that it might furnish both dwelling and fortress to the brethren against the Saracen and the corsair, who were wont to harry the littoral. Its construction fell within the reign of Raymond-Berengar the First, Count of Provence; yet the edifice attained its finished state only when Pope Honorius the Second issued a bull, urging the whole of Christendom to come and abide three months in the island, there to succour and defend the Lerins monks against the infidel, or to advance the tower's completion through charitable gifts — and to such as answered this call, he extended those same plenary indulgences which former popes had given to Crusaders. This bull also laid it upon those who had made

themselves masters of various churches and monastic properties to surrender them at once, without delay."

"Far be it from me to affect the philosopher, my reverend Dom, yet permit me to suggest that the bull containing these privileges is most questionable, and can in no wise be from Honorius the Second, to whom men ascribe it, inasmuch as the pontiff purporting to have granted it speaks therein of Eugene his predecessor — yet no Pope Honorius ever followed upon a Eugene. Secondly, it would have been proper to acquaint the lady with the fact that those commanded to make restitution of the churches and monastic goods were — what do you suppose? — bishops. Even as our good monks were occupied in building themselves a fortress to protect their property from the Saracens' depredations, the bishops were busy robbing them of the same.

"And as to the command laid upon the whole of Christendom to betake themselves for three months to an island whose entire area falls short of a league — you will grant, reverend father, that such was a wretched piece of foolery."

Whilst thus discoursing, they passed beneath two arches and ascended a flight of steps, coming at length to a drawbridge that opened upon the gateway of the tower. At this point there appeared before them a steep, ill-lit stair. The

moment Deborah's foot touched the lowest stair, there came a groan, and she shrank away. The sight of a monstrous shape of prodigious size, descending towards her in a slithering motion, sent her flying in horror. To set her mind at ease, Dom Fiacre took hold of her arm and guided her back towards the animal which had given her such a fright.

"Do not be afraid," said he. "He is a great friend of mine, this sea-calf[11] — he has made his home with us in the monastery these past weeks, quite unafraid of human company, as you see, and perfectly harmless. Do pet him, madame — he is exceedingly alive to gentle treatment. He was caught here, just by the strand. The shores of these islands abound with them, lying asleep in the sunshine."

Having inspected some few cells, a vast refectory, the soldiers' lodging, a platform mounted with artillery pieces, and — at the extremity of the second sleeping-hall — the library renowned for its wealth of rare manuscripts and early printed books, they made their way into the church within the tower, consecrated to the Holy Cross, in which were preserved the remains of multiple saints.

Dom Fiacre first guided them to the magnificent shrine of Saint Honoratus — a noble piece, inlaid everywhere with jewels and carved with extraordinary beauty. Thereafter he showed them three fleurs-de-lis fashioned in silver, wherein were set relics of Saint Peter, Saint Paul, both the Saints

James, and well-nigh the entire apostolic company; a thorn from the crown of thorns, a piece of wood from the true cross, and many another relic of surpassing sanctity; and at the last, a gilt coffer wherein lay the bones of five hundred brethren massacred by the Saracens in the days when Saint Porcarius held the abbacy, besides another coffer with the remains of thirty brethren martyred in company with Saint Aigulphus.

"My reverend father, being unwilling to injure your feelings once more, I have kept silent," said Monsieur de Cogolin at that moment, "but I pray you will now be kind enough to hear some observations I wish to make. In speaking of Saint Aigulphus, you should have mentioned that neither his martyrdom nor that of his fellows was at Saracen hands, as you would have the lady believe. Pray do not malign these wretched Saracens — enough has been heaped upon them without your adding to it. You should have made it clear to her that the monks of Lerins, having chosen Aigulphus of Fleury as their abbot, found him determined to purge the monastery of the shameful irregularities that flourished there, and to establish the Benedictine rule — he being the very man who had borne Saint Benedict's remains into France; that the godly abbot discovered no tractable disposition among his monks, who rose to abominable extremes against him — extremes so abominable that the wildest Saracen

would have been sickened by them; that they let loose their wrath upon the monastery itself, pillaging it with a savagery that would have made the Vandals look merciful; that they took prisoner Aigulphus and a number of monks faithful to him, cut out their tongues and put out their eyes, left them to languish two years on the island of Capraia, and then slaughtered them on yet another desolate island in the year 675.

"There is no denying it, my Reverend. In any case, this was hardly the sole example, and that *Paradisus terrestris*, that *quies piorum*, that *solamen dulce*, that *sinus tranquillissimus* — to use all those Latin flourishes you quoted from Dom Vincent Barral mere moments ago — proved oftentimes to be a hideous nest of vice. — My Reverend, these are no more than simple matters of historical record, advanced without the least ill intent; pray do not be offended, and above all things, do not ascribe them to the influence of Voltaire, the Encyclopédie, or the hapless Saracens!"

"If certain men, monsieur, are so bereft of divine grace as to work evil, there are yet others who devote themselves to nothing but laying it bare; who conceal all that is wholesome and parade forth the sores; who devote the sum of their days and the whole of their wit to discovering whatever might heap infamy on humanity, unearthing corruptions they should rather pile a mountain over. Which shall bear the heavier guilt

before the Almighty — he who did evil in the fever of emotion, or he who found satisfaction in unveiling it, possessed of the lifeless indifference of an unenthusiastic soul and a twisted heart? The answer I leave with you. — These remarks are not aimed at you, my dear Governor; you are a good man, generous and upright, and one whom I love and hold in honour. You are not one of the evildoers, yet you have yielded to the power of those who parade evil abroad; and it is this that afflicts me so deeply. Does it not wound the heart to find that even those of greatest rectitude and nobility have been unable to escape the corrupting influence? And that mere handfuls of vermin have been enough to infect and pervert France, even as a few maggots will ruin the most beautiful fruit!"

When a moment had passed in silence, Dom Fiacre turned his attention to Deborah and, directing her gaze to the high altar, took up his discourse again:

"You see there, madame, the resting place of Saint Venantius, Saint Honoratus's own brother, alongside Saint Vincent of Lerins, that most celebrated divine whose doctrine and virtue are known throughout Christendom.

"Behold too this exceedingly fine reliquary, wherein are preserved fragments of Saint Patrick, the apostle to the Irish. Aspiring to reach a higher state of perfection in the religious

life to which he had devoted himself, he sought refuge in the monastery of Lerins and remained there nine years entire."

Dom Fiacre got no further: Deborah had abruptly lost all colour and begun to totter, then fallen heavily to her knees before collapsing onto the church pavement.

The fit of unconsciousness lasted long.

They removed her to a leafy bower in the garden.

As consciousness returned and her eyelids parted, the Governor was ministering orange juice to her lips, and the Benedictine was prostrate before her, his arms stretched out in the shape of a cross. Feelings of propriety and awkwardness brought a blush to her cheeks, making her utter a timid sound and carry her fingers quickly to where her corset had been loosened. But what she said first was to offer thanks for the kindness being shown her.

"Pray do not distress yourselves, gentlemen," she said further. "It was merely a sudden shock to my feelings. When my eyes fell upon those relics of Saint Patrick, there arose within me all together such painful memories of home and of love that they overcame me utterly and left me breathless. Reverend father, I am Irish born, and my husband, foully murdered not many months ago, was Patrick by name. O my Patrick, my poor Patrick! See, reverend father — here he is! That is his likeness suspended from this chain. He was a fine-

looking man, was he not? Yet know this — he was still more virtuous, still more honourable. They took his life, the cruel villains, and spared mine!"

"Daughter, bow before God's inscrutable judgements; what understanding have you of why your husband was taken from you at the very dawn of your life together? What understanding have you of the future He is keeping for you? The sorrows that have touched you are known to you, but what of those from which He has guarded you, and guards you even now?"

"I am myself again now, my Reverend, considerably better; I am able to rise and walk about — let us finish our pilgrimage."

Supporting Deborah on his arm, Monsieur de Cogolin brought her to the calanque of Saint Columban — a grotto against whose foot the sea pounds without ceasing. The sea stood high at that time, so that they could not gain entrance without being drenched up to mid-thigh.

"It is here," said Dom Fiacre in tones of gravity, "in this desolate spot, that Saints Eleutherius and Columban took shelter when the Saracens put to death the five hundred monks whose relics we saw not long since. Having seen, however, the souls of those blessed cenobites ascending into heaven in the semblance of gleaming stars, Saint Columban

left his hiding place in the grotto and went to surrender himself to the heathen axe, that he too might be numbered among his martyred brethren."

These words provoked the Governor to an outburst of laughter, and with the manner of one who scorns all superstition, he fixed our earnest mystagogue with an impish gaze:

"Ah, by all that's holy, my Reverend!" he burst out. "What marvels you're serving up to us! Ah, but this fable is too much — it will not do. — Certainly, if this butchery took place under cover of darkness especially, no catherine wheel or firework exhibition ever furnished so splendid a sight as five hundred and one souls rising heavenward like roman candles in the form of blazing stars. I own I should be vastly curious to observe such a spectacle of ascending souls, and chiefly to know whether, to make them rise in this fashion, one must furnish them with an osier stick as one does with squibs and crackers."

Quitting the calanque, now profaned by the Governor's scoffing remarks, they went to the south-east tip of the island and got into a little craft to cross the narrow passage that lies between Saint-Honorat and a small isle known as Saint-Féréol. In the time of Saint Amand's rule as abbot, when the brotherhood swelled to more than three thousand hermits and Lerina had not room for all, some of these devout souls

removed to Lerinus and Sainte-Marguerite — which boasts among its most celebrated anchorites Saint Eucherius of Lyons — whilst others made their homes upon the smaller islands nearby, at La Fornigue, at La Grenille, and on this isle, which bears the name of Saint Ferreolus, whose cell is still to be seen, a cavity barely capacious enough for a single human frame.

Having passed a fairly lengthy interval upon this savage crag — which looks from afar like a withered leaf adrift — and from whose vantage the gaze, skimming along the water's face, darts across the watery vastness with all the swiftness of an imp, even to the Gulf of Genoa, they returned to the Frioul and to the vessel that had conveyed them thither.

Deborah gave Dom Fiacre her affectionate thanks, and then, falling to her knees, besought his benediction.

"I bless you," said he, "in the name of Him who is haven to all who suffer; be blessed in the sight of the three immensities — the land, the sea, the sky — which are but a faint image of God's boundless immensity. My child, do not allow yourself to be conquered by grief; despair has no place in a Christian heart; despair is among the gravest of blasphemies against God. — Turn to prayer, and He shall not leave you comfortless. — What significance has a chain or a lock to the All-Powerful?… He who brought Daniel forth

from the lions' lair will well know how to bring His handmaiden — *ancilla sua*[12] — from the lair of men."

[1] *ταπεινός*: the Greek adjective meaning low, humble, or abject; the Provençal *tapenos* for the caper-bush preserves the original Greek root.

[2] *Barba-Jovis*: literally "Jupiter's beard" (*Anthyllis barba-jovis*), a silvery-leaved shrub native to the Mediterranean littoral, named for the resemblance of its foliage to a venerable white beard.

[3] *Agnus-castus*: the chaste tree (*Vitex agnus-castus*), whose name indeed doubles its meaning — *agnus* being Latin for lamb and *castus* meaning chaste, while the Greek *agnos* carries the same sense of purity. It was traditionally associated with chastity.

[4] *Aloe folio in oblongum aculeum abeunte*: a Linnaean-style botanical descriptor meaning "aloe with a leaf tapering to an oblong point."

[5] *The Wandering Jew's inexhaustible five sous*: an allusion to the legend of the Wandering Jew, condemned to roam the earth until the Second Coming; in certain popular versions he carries a perpetually replenished coin, spending it and finding it restored. The Governor's point is that inexhaustible quantities are a commonplace of folklore rather than a miracle.

[6] *The Thebaid*: the desert region of Upper Egypt around Thebes, celebrated in early Christian tradition as the cradle of monasticism, where the Desert Fathers — Anthony, Paul, Pachomius — established the first hermitages and communities of the religious life.

[7] Baillet: Adrien Baillet (1649–1706), French scholar and hagiographer, author of *Vies des saints*, a critical and sometimes sceptical examination of hagiographical tradition.

[8] *Tillemont*: Louis-Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698), French ecclesiastical historian and Jansenist, whose *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique* was a standard work of painstaking early Church scholarship.

[9] *Abbé Expilly*: Jean-Joseph d'Expilly (1719–1793), French geographer and abbé, compiler of the *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et politique des Gaules et de la France*.

[10] *The Encyclopédie*: the *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1772), edited by Diderot and d'Alembert; the great monument of French Enlightenment thought and a symbol, to its critics, of irreligion and the dissolution of traditional authority.

[11] *Sea-calf*: the common seal or monk seal; Mediterranean monk seals (*Monachus monachus*) were once abundant along these coasts and associated in local tradition with the monastic islands.

[12] *Ancilla sua*: "His handmaid"; an echo of the *Magnificat* (*ancilla Domini*, "handmaid of the Lord"), the words with

which the Virgin Mary accepted God's will (Luke 1:38). Dom Fiacre's benediction casts Deborah quietly in the role of a holy woman in the hands of Providence.

VII.

The Governor was in the habit of assembling his prisoners in his reception-room twice or thrice weekly, there to provide them with evening entertainments of a sort, wherein they might discourse together and try their fortunes at basset or ombre.[1] These assemblies saw little of Deborah; she would present herself only when she was not given over to sorrowful moods. Genuine sorrow will admit of no diversion: it locks itself within, persists in gazing upon its own face, taking a dark comfort in that solitary meeting, as a woman might before the mirror which reflects her back to herself; everything that is not grief itself appears loathsome, grotesque, and offensive. It has been observed that sorrow is like those lenses which, through a strange play of light, turn upside-down, contract, or stretch out the fairest shapes, and make of a beautiful statue an absurd and twisted thing. And yet, contrariwise, might it not be merely a clarifying instrument, which lays bare the

reality of what our upbringing, our preconceptions, our delusions, the confusion of our passions, and our own pride have caused us to perceive amiss? Sorrow could well be likened to those scales in which Justice is held to weigh matters — had Justice's scales the virtue of weighing justly.

There were then but eight or ten prisoners held within the fortress. Amongst them were two old men in perfect health and full possession of their faculties, whose children, being powerful at Court, had succeeded in having them declared *non compos mentis* and imprisoned as lunatics, thereby taking possession of their estates and enjoying the fruits thereof in advance of their rightful succession.

Though scarcely anything was wanting to the material ease of Deborah's existence, she had become more shadowed in mind and downcast in spirit than ever. Odd and restless desires followed her continually, she aspired to a state of existence altogether different and far removed; and being confined, she reasoned thus with herself: "Freedom — it is the want of freedom that troubles me." This nebulous craving, however, is something man takes with him wherever he goes and whatever his condition: be he at liberty or in chains, in sorrow or in gladness, his soul remains ever agitated by its reachings after an infinity and an unknowable that cannot be explained. Could it be the unsteady motion of that spark which glows within our lamp of mortal clay, as it tries

to rise back to the fountain of light whence it was severed? Can it be some half-recalled memory of a finer existence already lived, or the foreboding of a finer existence still to be? Whoever it was that first likened existence to a pilgrimage and man to a wandering pilgrim uttered one of those profound truths that issue but infrequently from the genius of our race, and which, after the fashion of lightning, pour a sea of luminosity into the blackness. Man, surely, is he not akin to the wayfarer who always reaches forward in desire? But what, precisely, does he desire? Of this much we may be certain: it is not annihilation in the grave towards which he reaches.

Living as she did in such isolation, Deborah found her sensibilities exalted to an unusual degree, whilst there arose in her those melancholy mists that are wont to trouble women during their months of expectancy. The thought of all the ills she had borne clung fast to her understanding and would not leave it, whilst her heart brimmed over with self-reproach and sorrow. She laid to her own charge the demise of her mother and the loss of Patrick. It appeared to her as though their shadows moved unquietly in the air about her and came near enough to touch her flesh. The creaking of the lock when her door rattled, the noise of the wind, the pulsing sounds made by those insects that tap and drill through ancient woodwork with their piercing tools — in all these she fancied she could distinguish the sound of their approaching steps or their

plaintive moans and sighs. From time to time, to be sure, Monsieur de Cogolin would appear and bestow upon her some portion of his leisure, yet his discourse was of so trifling a nature that Deborah tasted small delight in it and gained little sustenance therefrom. Dom Fiacre, too, called upon her fairly often; yet since he worked upon her without mercy, pressing dogmas and doctrines upon her mind, he was more of a nuisance than a pleasure, and behaved less like a blessed consoler than like one bent upon her persecution. The fellow-prisoners she shunned to the greatest extent she could. The appearance of numerous such sufferers, who had crossed the threshold of this fortress in the bloom of youth as she had done, and whose locks had whitened during their confinement within its walls, afflicted her with profound sorrow and seemed to foretell her own future — a future against which every power her soul commanded set itself in rigid defiance. She scarcely ever kept up a conversation for long; what responses she gave were curt, and now and then they fell into actual unreason. She found her liveliest satisfaction in pacing about the Governor's garden, in pacing there in solitude, and in seeking out its most heavily shaded reaches.

Deborah had been four months at Sainte-Marguerite when she gave birth to a son. Great was her rejoicing, and upon him she bestowed the name of Vengeance. The choice

of name filled Monsieur de Cogolin with alarm; and Dom Fiacre brought to bear all the persuasive arts his rhetorical abilities could furnish in trying to have this godless appellation exchanged for the patronymic of a blessed apostle. But Deborah would not be turned from her purpose.

Having borne this boy, she recovered the full force of her determination and bravery. In all the watchful cares that belong to motherhood she found relief from thoughts of her unhappy lot. She found profound comfort in being a mother, in seeing Patrick restored to life through this infant who already resembled him; in being protectress to a being yet more helpless than she was; in having a life that hung upon hers, in having the shaping of a mind and character before her. Her coming years, which had seemed to her vacant, shadowy, and devoid of aim, were now suddenly replete with purpose. She possessed now a prolonged and tender undertaking, work to be done, obligations to meet, a presence beside her, every feeling of her heart claimed, the whole course of her days engaged. She fancied that genuine felicity might still be within her reach if she gave herself up to cherishing this breathing remembrance, this memory made flesh, but for that it was necessary to wrench herself free from the prison cell in which she was doomed to waste away and perish — she must have her liberty again. Such had been the object of her contemplation for many months past. The

time for carrying out her purpose seeming to her at length to have come, she penned this letter to Sir John Chatsworth, her guardian and man of law in Dublin:

Dear and honoured friend,

I stand in need of you, you are my one remaining shelter, do not abandon me, else I shall be abandoned by everything. Call to mind with kindness your poor Debby — your daughter, as you were wont to name her and to cherish her — whose small arms were wrapped so many times around your neck, and whom you cradled so frequently in your long black robes. From my infancy you knew me, from my youngest days you loved me; love me yet, or love me at least one time more, I beseech you in the name of my unfortunate mother, I beseech you in the name of her father, my grandfather, who felt such strong friendship towards you. He put me in your charge, he appointed you my guardian, he gave into your keeping both my person and my possessions — I beg you to save me, since both my means and my destiny rest with you.

On quitting Ireland, which was nearly ten months since, I dispatched to you a full relation of everything that had lately befallen my family, and of what necessitated my self-imposed banishment; the relation was dismal, the relation was heart-rending, and your benevolent heart was doubtless much moved

by it — I ask your forgiveness for the sorrow I inflicted upon you. I fancied that exile would mark the end of my sorrows and provide me with the contentment my being so eagerly sought, having as I did someone alongside whom I could partake of it. I thought to encounter in France both freedom and generous shelter!... Alas! never was any soul more cruelly deceived than I have been! Better far had I betaken myself to the desolation of Barca![2] Herewith you will discover a new relation, accurate and truthful, of all the events that have come to pass since I took refuge upon the Continent. The one before was harrowing, this is ghastly! If your nature abhors dismal narratives, if reading of injustice causes you suffering, then take this paper, rip it asunder, fling it into the flames.... In that case, know simply this: that I am now held captive in a royal dungeon, and that my sole means of departure will be upon a gravedigger's back. Yet with your aid and succour, such a fate need not come to pass. I have given prolonged thought to various designs for breaking free; the one I present here is the safest and most uncomplicated, and it is the one I have chosen. The costs will be formidable, to be sure; but let that not cause you to hesitate, since I have ample means, God be thanked, and as of three days ago I have attained my legal majority.

(There was set forth here a design for breaking free, uncommonly daring and elaborated with perfect exactness.)

Though you may consider all these particulars to be small matters, none must be passed over — the entire fate of the scheme turns upon them.

I undertake to meet every expense: for the vessel's preparation, for those who sail her, and for the voyage. Should you light upon a proper man who wants in excess of twenty thousand livres, let him have it — do not scruple. I am willing, if need be, to part with my entire estate if that will secure my release from where I now languish. In order to ransom a life, be it ever so miserable, there exists no payment too costly.

This entire business will cost you no small degree of trouble and concern, my excellent guardian, yet you must believe that I understand how vast is the assistance you are preparing to give me — assistance beyond the reach of any adequate recognition. I shall maintain forever a gratitude that nothing can alter, and this, together with the affection my heart holds for you, will make of you the most dearly loved of all men, just as you are the man most deserving of such love.

Having finished the letter, Deborah made haste to carry it to Monsieur de Cogolin, whom she had beforehand, and very cunningly, acquainted with her intention of addressing her guardian on the subject of her grandfather's legacy and requesting a statement of her property — a project to which

he had given his full-hearted approval and encouragement. She held it out to him quite open, entreating him to peruse it if he would be so kind, yet perfectly assured he would not do so — partly from chivalrous sentiment, partly from a sense of propriety, but chiefly because his acquaintance with English amounted to no more than a few scattered words.

"Have your letter sealed, my charming friend — confidence for confidence, that is my way with you," he told her, clasping and kissing her hands. "Seal it and let me have it immediately — one of my men leaves for Antibes within the hour, and I shall charge him with its delivery."

Deborah offered her thanks with proper civility, but held herself in very strict check, fearful of letting him perceive how much happiness this opening success had awakened in her breast.

[1] *Basset and ombre*: two card games fashionable in eighteenth-century European courts. Basset was a banking game of chance, notoriously ruinous and eventually banned in France; ombre was a trick-taking game of Spanish origin, popular among the educated classes and celebrated in Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*.

[2] *Barca*: the ancient Greek colonial city on the Libyan coast (near modern Al-Marj), proverbially remote and desolate; used here as an emblem of the most forsaken extremity of the known world.

BOOK THE FIFTH.

VIII.

"What ho! Sentinel, do you keep your watch?"

"Declare yourself!"

"On the King's business. Have the bridge lowered."

For a considerable time, no sound was heard. From the castle, the bell marked eleven o'clock at night. Darkness, heavy and complete, enveloped everything.

"Declare yourself!" came the challenge again from some way off.

"I come by order of the King! 'Tis Jean Buot!"

"Ah, Monsieur Buot! I am your servant, sir, most humbly. You have game for us, I'll be bound? We have not a hen-coop to spare — on which hook would you have us bestow the fellow?"

Screeching upon their iron fastenings, the chains brought the great bridge heavily down, and presently a coach came on: two men emerged therefrom, one of whom carried a sword at his flank, whilst the other was shackled hand and foot with iron fetters and bolts; and behind these two came two further men, the sergeant on watch and the keeper of the dungeon-tower.

They found themselves at length before an encircling wall of prodigious elevation, affording but one means of ingress and guarded by a brace of sentries; three gigantic doors, fixed at successive points within a wall whose thickness surpassed sixteen feet, were thrown open and then secured behind them.

By the expiring radiance of an iron lamp, grim as a funeral light, their tread was illumined as it rang out beneath the vaults, joining with the clamour of sliding bolts and grating ironwork that turned upon enormous pivots. Whithersoever the gaze might penetrate the darkness, it met with naught but a terrible display of locks, bolts, nuts, padlocks, and bars of iron.

Having traversed a newel stair — narrow, serpentine, and abrupt, drawing out the passage and redoubling the turns, obstructed from fathom to fathom by doors secured with unyielding strictness — at the level of the first floor, a wicket — seeming for all the world a wall that travels back and forth

— gave way, and thus they came into a spacious chamber with an ogival vault above, sustained by one pillar alone that stood at its heart.

Lifting his head, which had been bent low as befits a sacrificial victim, the young man in chains read the inscription that surmounted the door: CARCER TORMENTORUM,[1] the Hall of Examination; and observed that every surface of wall and the barrel of the vault itself were laden with instruments designed for torment that were strange to the eye and of unknown purpose. Ranged about the entire perimeter stood stone seats, each girt about with iron rings fixed fast in masonry, by which means the limbs of those unfortunate souls might be fastened upon these thrones of pain when the moment of their examination arrived. There were to be observed as well, in various quarters, some rough wooden pallets, where they would fetter the poor wretch at such times as, prostrated beyond endurance and approaching the gates of death, they gave him a momentary relief to bring him back to consciousness, the better to inflict further torture upon him.

Shortly thereafter appeared the King's Lieutenant who held command of the Keep. After Monsieur Jean Buot had placed in his hands the orders and sealed warrant from Minister Phélypeaux de Saint-Florentin de la Vrillière, he contemplated his new charge for an instant, then, in keeping with the usual forms, gave orders to the turnkeys that they

should search him. That they might apply themselves to the work with appropriate zealousness, he first showed them the way by undertaking it himself. Once he had rolled his cuffs clear of his wrists, he plunged his hands into the fobs and into each and every pocket; and, much as a surgeon intent upon discovering a hernia might do, he swept his fingers over even the most intimate parts of the body.

"What infamy! What loathsomeness!..."

The prisoner started with righteous anger, turned his head aside, and spat upon the wall in contempt. They relieved him of his silver, his watch, such jewelled articles as he possessed, his lace collars, his pocketbook.... His fetters were struck off: both arms and legs bore the marks of abrasion from their rubbing, and showed livid with bruising from the constriction that, having stopped the flow of blood, had raised welts all about, as one might see upon a vine-stem throttled by cords. Once our wretched prisoner had been freed of his restraints, Monsieur Jean Buot cried out with a gravity so overdone as to provoke mirth: "Sirs, you behold a dangerous maniac — be upon your guard; and you, Lieutenant, pray have the goodness to unsheathe your blade." The prisoner's sole reaction to this solemn warning was a smile — a smile, however, of the most acrid kind.

His clothing was at last removed, and they threw over him filthy shreds which had, in all likelihood, drunk deep of

the tears and dying sweats of some luckless wretch who had met his end whilst enchained.

The wretched youth's eyes released their burden of tears, his legs trembled and would no longer support him; he collapsed in a heap upon one of the stone seats designed for torture. Making use of his fainting condition, two keepers drew him bodily from that hall; and, returning by way of the crooked staircase, and traversing underneath a lair not unlike the first, evidently put to use as a scullery, they carried him through into an appalling dungeon on the ground floor, where he was stretched upon a sparse quantity of straw, but not before they had fastened him with chains to the wall. Then, just as though he were in any state to listen, Monsieur the King's Lieutenant gave him a brief and lofty order that he must on no account make the least whisper of sound, for this place, said he, was the dwelling-place of silence.

Such it was in very deed — the dwelling of silence, but no less the dwelling of starvation and the final sleep.

Ere many minutes had passed, he began to retrieve command of his wits; yet the more he regained his senses, the more copiously did his tears flow. Seeking to learn into what manner of place he had been cast, he pushed himself up to sit, running his fingers over the surrounding surfaces and trying to make out some recognisable form in the encompassing murk. Of a sudden, there came to him what

appeared to be the sound of painful breathing; he held himself still to listen — and the sound went on. There could be no question of it — 'twas breathing!... Yet was this the breathing of a fellow-man, or that of some ferocious animal?

Horror clutched at him; he drew himself forward and strained his ears anew.... Now his hearing detected a slight stirring and the sound of limbs being stretched with a cracking as of joints pulled apart.

"The blackness is of such depth that I am lost to my own vision. Is there not another here?" he said, speaking in tones that were nearly inaudible.

Nothing was said in return. Only there came a movement of something in the dark, and a prolonged sigh escaped into the darkness.

"Have no alarm, whoever you may be that lies close by! I am merely a poor wretch in chains. For the love of God! take pity and speak to me!"

"Who has broken silence here? Can it be you, keeper?... Who comes at this hour to break the stillness of my dungeon?"

"Spiorad-naom![2]... This voice — can it be that I recognise it!..."

"Wake I, or is this but a fevered dream!..." the same voice breathed in muted accents. "A voice I know has reached my hearing!..."

"Dia-an-mac![3] What death-like apparition moves to and fro before me, and makes sport of my soul? My wits have fled! It is not he... he is long dead.... Yet who can tell whether the dead abide in their graves?... Patrick, dear Patrick, my brother, can this be you indeed! Mac-Phadruig,[4] is that your voice?..."

"Fitz-Harris!... Alas!... poor wretch, you also cast into this pit!"

"Patrick, Patrick, dear brother, I have found you once more!... Joy most horrible!... If it be in your power, come hither that I may embrace you, so that I may feel your living form pressed to my heart and know you are flesh and not a ghost! for my disordered wits cannot accept you as real; for everything here seems to me but the phantom-work of fever."

And springing towards one another through the darkness, straining their chains to the furthest reach, they struck together breast to breast, then fell upon their knees with their arms wound about each other.

Entwined thus like serpents, they overwhelmed one another with kisses and tears.

Finally Fitz-Harris exclaimed: "Patrick, I grieved so deeply, believing you dead!... You are given back to me.... And now I must weep for you once more!..."

"Brother," said Patrick, taking up his speech once more, "since you and I are marked out alike for suffering, let Heaven be praised for making our lots identical, yoking us to one common misery as two wretches are coupled together at the galley-bench! Brother, there is rejoicing in such a meeting as this — aye, even under the very blade of the headsman."

And so they embraced anew, and both men wept, and for a considerable while neither of them spoke.

"But Harris — of Deborah you have said not a word. Did you not chance to see her since the hour I disappeared? Can you tell me nothing of what has befallen her? Come, tell me plainly — you need not scruple to add to my affliction; already I sense the shadow of her calamity, which cannot fail to be as hideous as our own! Poor hapless child!..."

"My brother, I had determined, before leaving France behind forever, to take my leave of you properly, and to implore your pardon one last time, and ask that you would consign to oblivion all the wrong I had so cowardly wrought against you; it was with this intention that I betook myself to the Hôtel Saint-Papoul; but it was Deborah who answered my knock — quite alone, beside herself with grief, with her

tresses hanging loose about her face — and, accusing me of things the very thought of which makes me shudder, she told me that you had been slain, and that upon me rested the burden of your death! When at length she had emerged from that ghastly conviction, I made her an offer: that in reparation for my sins against you, I would surrender myself to her service as an act of atonement; she, however, spurned me violently, and summoned down upon my person every execration imaginable. Oh! that dreadful curse wrapped itself about me like a vestment woven of lead. It haunts me at every turn as a she-wolf stalks her prey; it bites deep, it devours me piecemeal, it hovers perpetually over every thought I conceive and corrupts them all. — At the last I withdrew from her; I took myself off, and never since have I beheld her."

"I hold it to your credit, Fitz-Harris, that you made such an attempt, and regard it as proof of that excellence of heart which I never once questioned in you. You have my gratitude for the good services you tendered to Deborah; I am saddened beyond measure that she met you with such unyielding coldness. I understand full well that she is not disposed to let bygones be bygones, that she clings to old wounds.... And yet, must we not remember what a ghastly hour she was living through? Forgiveness comes painfully when injuries are fresh and bleeding, when the dagger remains fast in the cut. Take no affliction from her curse: a

curse hurled in fury is barren of effect. If by some mercy we are one day restored to the land of the living, or find ourselves once more in Deborah's presence, make your mind easy — I shall guide her back to more charitable dispositions. My own regard for you stands undiminished, of that you may be assured. Let us bury in eternal oblivion whatsoever evil has existed between us; let us preserve in our hearts only the recollection of happier days when love united us, and that we are bound together as brothers in childhood, in young life, in suffering, and in our mother-country. — Brother, let us hold fast to our friendship — depend upon it, we shall stand in need of it."

"Brother, genuine friendship is no longer possible for us; mine adds nothing to your reputation, and I have rendered myself unfit to receive yours: my one hope is to restore myself to your good graces, and I ask nothing of you save forgiveness and merciful understanding."

And so they held one another yet again, and gave way to weeping, and yet again a great quietude settled over them.

"Patrick, where might we be? The night was so pitch-dark that I could not make out where I was being brought."

"We are confined within the fortress-keep of the Castle of Vincennes."[5]

"And this deadened, persistent noise — from whence does it come?"

"Quiet. That is the guard on its rounds below our windows. It passes thus twice in every hour, and at dawn and dusk it goes the full length of the ditches."

"And yet, Patrick, you must tell me, since I know nothing of it — by what means did anyone come to suppose that you had been killed?"

"It was the day itself of my expulsion from the company; I had made up my mind to shake the dust of France from my feet — you know well enough some of my reasons, and others I mean to tell you by and by. That evening, as I was going to the Messageries,[6] I found myself suddenly attacked by four armed fellows acting, so they claimed, in His Majesty's name. With a bound backwards I grasped at my sword, for I was determined they should not take me alive; I cried out that murderers were upon me, and managed to strike at more than one of them. Suddenly a window was thrown open above, and Deborah, hearing and knowing my voice, shouted to me: 'Be brave! Strike hard, strike hard! I am flying to you — to help you!' But even as she spoke, one of those four hired dogs slipped round behind me and buried his steel in my flank; I fell where I stood, they picked me up without ceremony, and hurled me together with themselves into a waiting carriage drawn up a few paces off. And fourteen days

have now passed since they cast me into this wretched hole. I have tried to get a letter to Deborah, to let her know what had become of me, but pen and paper were denied me most mercilessly — they have refused me everything, in fact, but a little bread and water to keep body and soul together.

"Yet you, Fitz-Harris — you must tell me: through what unhappy chance have you come to be thrown into this place with me?"

"Three days after leaving Paris I found myself at Calais, putting up at an inn whilst I waited for the packet to depart, when there came into my room, quite suddenly, a short man as pink-cheeked as any cherub, who asked if he might find Monsieur Fitz-Harris there. Since a playful thought had occurred to me, and auguring no good from such a caller, I countered his question with a question of my own: 'Do you wish to speak to him in person?' 'Yes, monsieur.' 'Then you must seek him out yourself.' 'That is what I am doing, monsieur,' came his response. 'My name is Jean Buot.' 'Monsieur, I am absolutely delighted to learn it.' 'I serve as an agent of police.' 'Monsieur, you have my felicitations upon the distinction.' 'M. Fitz-Harris, in the name of His Majesty, the Law, and Justice, I arrest you.' — 'You mean, surely, in the name of the woman who beds the King, the Law, and Justice together...' As he came forward to seize me, I picked him up off his feet and carried him to an empty travelling-chest I had

earlier marked in the corner. In the instant I closed the lid over him, he managed to sound his whistle; three of his fellows came bursting into the chamber, set their captain free, and trussed me up to take me off to gaol. I was marched on foot through the streets; all along the way I suffered the hooting and abuse of the mob. Men take pleasure in seeing their fellow creatures brought low. Now and then, when there is nothing else to be had, they will applaud victories and pageants readily enough, yet what pleases them most of all is to see a fellow creature marched off to the scaffold. I spent a week and a day in the prison into which my captor had placed me. The jailer let slip to me, in a confidential whisper, that M. Jean Buot, whilst roving about the city, had secured a lady's favours, and was neglecting both his prisoner and his professional honour in a riot of voluptuous indulgence. Eventually, having torn himself from his Agnès Sorel's[7] embraces, M. Jean Buot showed himself once more, placed me in irons hand and foot, and had me climb aboard a coach. Not having forgotten the business with the trunk, and judging himself unsafe in my presence, he ran a chain beneath my knees and round my neck that kept me doubled over, and would not untie my hands during the whole voyage; he preferred to accept the nuisance of feeding me on a fork, like a caged bird. — Doubtless you slept, brother, when they threw me into this place? I myself was in such turmoil that not a shred of memory remains to me."

The first light of dawn was appearing. As the pale light seeped bit by bit through what appeared to be a narrow slit in the wall, Fitz-Harris was able to form some notion of the dungeon into which he had been plunged. The examination occupied him but briefly: in addition to a miry floor and four crumbling walls, glazed with a fatty, near-black discharge, streaked with the slippery paths of slugs, and shrouded in cobwebs rendered thick as bat membranes by layers of dust, he could make out nothing else but a sort of sleeping-shelf gouged like a drain into the stone — Patrick was lying there — and at the foot or the head of this shelf, this trough rather, a hole serving as a privy, from which emanated a pestilential stink: it was the only part of that cesspool which the chains binding the prisoners permitted them to reach.

Adding greatly to the wretched grimness of this dungeon was the tedious refrain of the sentinels stationed outside who, charged with commanding those who passed to look away from the Keep, had done nothing since the break of day but chant repeatedly: "Keep moving! Keep moving!"

Though he had begged again and again, Patrick could not get a surgeon to attend his wound, which had been left wholly without bandaging; it made him suffer dreadfully. He entreated Fitz-Harris to look at it. The sword had entered far into the side and had inflicted a gaping wound. The gash was livid, envenomed, and running with pus. Fitz-Harris wiped it

softly with a stem of straw dipped in water, and ripped his shirt into strips to fashion compresses and dressing-bands. Patient and solicitous beyond measure, he kept up this toilsome task until the healing was complete — which is to say for no less than six weeks — equipped with no medicinal resources beyond polluted water and cataplasms of bread-crumb which he worked in his own mouth.

It was near the middle of the day when Fitz-Harris heard, from without, the sustained howling of some dog, and the sound appeared to him to come from the very foot of the tower, below where the dungeon's slit admitted a meagre light. The sounds served him, in the first instance, merely as fodder for jesting.

"Patrick," he said, "do you mark that dog's howling? What a prophetic creature! It warns me I am to be stripped of my freedom and imprisoned in a keep. How very proper! A dog of discretion, this — one too cautious to commit the folly of reckless auguries, preferring to wait until my woes are fully accomplished before he condescends to foretell them. Surely he puts you in mind of those sibylline hags who remark, affecting great discernment, to maidens whose prodigious bellies jut out like balconies: 'The cards tell me, mademoiselle — the knave of spades particularly — that your flower has been plucked'?"

On and on the dog continued, never flagging in its clamour. Upon the instant, struck by a kind of wondering recognition, Fitz-Harris became quite still and gave his whole attention to listening.

"Can such a thing be! Methinks I recognise the voice of my poor Cork, whom that savage M. Jean Buot never would allow into the coach with me, saying by way of reason — the jesting brute — that his warrant made provision for but a single head. Is such a thing to be believed — that he should have pursued us from as far as Calais, where the brute caused us to be parted from him? Even so... is that not unmistakably his lugubrious tone? Tell me you hear it as I do!"

Then he gave a whistle and cried out as loudly as he was able: "Cork! My friend Cork!" Such rapturous barking answered him as could leave no further doubt in the matter. Overcome with joy and wonder at so much natural sagacity and affection, he hastily gathered what dry bread he possessed and tossed it through the slit in the wall; the dog's howling stopped at once, and one could hear the creature munching. Just then the keeper of the keys came in; he was carrying their morning meal. Fitz-Harris conveyed to him how exceedingly grateful he should be were he permitted to keep his dog beside him, and besought the man to go and fetch it. The keeper gave him a brusque answer: "Out of the question." Fitz-Harris petitioned him with all the fervour one reserves

for an obdurate mistress; the fellow merely turned upon his heel and left. Fitz-Harris brushed a tear from his eye, called out to Cork, threw the poor beast half his meagre breakfast, and bade him a mournful adieu, bidding him seek a master less wretched than himself. On the day following, however, judge of his surprise when the faithful animal reappeared at exactly the same hour, barking below the dungeon walls. As on the preceding day, Fitz-Harris once again shared what breakfast he had with the dog, and made fresh supplication to the keeper, who gave him the same answer: "Out of the question."

And so it went, day after day, through freezing weather and rainfall alike, faithful Cork would come to howl and keep company with his captive master, whom he could not see; day after day Fitz-Harris shared his bread with the creature, and day after day he implored the turnkey on the dog's behalf, only to receive from that merciless man, implacable as stone, the same croaking refrain: "Out of the question."

September had seen them plunged into this squalid cell: deprived of fire and of any covering, they lived through the entire winter there, which was exceptionally harsh and seemed never to end. During the first week of March, the King's Lieutenant — he who had charge of the Keep — came to see them. The said De Guyonet had the reputation of being reasonably kind, reasonably fair, and reasonably agreeable in

his dealings with the prisoners under his charge. Mistrustful at first, he stationed himself beyond their reach with his sword ready; but once he had exchanged words with them for a brief time, his apprehensions dissolved upon the instant; he had believed himself about to meet with raving madmen, whereas he faced nothing more than a pair of youths abounding in wit, self-possession, and quiet fortitude.

"My friends," he declared, "I feel the keenest regret at having dealt with you so roughly; truly, my misjudgement weighs heavily upon me. When you were taken, the fight you put up against the men who seized you, and the representations they made to me afterwards, had quite misled my judgement. The picture I had been given was of wild ruffians of the most perilous kind. Pray forgive my wretched behaviour toward you; I shall do what lies in my power — and in my nature — to set matters right. I wonder at it, and I am especially glad of that providential chance which made me lodge you together in the same prison — friends as you are, and compatriots. Chance has served you well in this, and I have no intention of disturbing its work; dismiss all anxiety on that score — you shall remain together. Now then, my good fellows, on your feet — come along with me."

Unburdened at last of their chains, our two hapless friends went with him.

Having climbed the winding stair for what seemed an age, they arrived at the fourth floor and found themselves in a spacious hall not unlike the place where men were put to the question. In one angle of the room were three doors — each equipped with a pair of locks, three bolts, and enormous iron stays to keep them from giving way — and they opened against one another in such fashion that the first was secured by the second, and the second by the third, this last being wholly sheathed in iron; through these they passed into an eight-sided room of most melancholy aspect, which by comparison with the foul pit they were leaving struck them as something approaching a pleasure-ground. The room boasted a chimney, a pair of chairs, a mean bed, a table, a pitcher whose rim was chipped, and four darkened squares of glass admitting such meagre light as could force its way through a cramped aperture defended by a grille, iron bars, and double metal tracery.

Monsieur the Lieutenant arranged for them to have fire, books, and writing implements — paper, quills and ink-pot — and assigned them the standard prison fare: wine, meat, and herring. By way of an extraordinary indulgence, he allowed them the use of the garden for exercise — a plot some thirty paces long — where they might walk for the recovery of their health, accompanied by their keeper and a quartet of sergeant-guards. The steadfastness of Cork had worked upon

his feelings; he consented to Fitz-Harris keeping the dog near him, and on several occasions even gave it an affectionate pat. What an astonishing development!

No sooner had Patrick the means than he wrote with anxious haste, seeking any word of Deborah. On the third day following, he found himself in receipt of a chest and a letter from Monsieur Goudouly, the hotel-keeper with whom he had once lodged. The worthy man began by conveying considerable surprise and relief at discovering Patrick to be a prisoner in Vincennes — for he had supposed him long since dead and buried — and then reported that on the day subsequent to that evening when Patrick had been assaulted and carried away as he emerged from the hotel, Lady Deborah had gone abroad and never come home again, and that since that day, all his investigations notwithstanding, he could learn nothing of what had befallen her; he promised, however, that if ever he should glean any intelligence regarding her circumstances, he would lose no time in making it known.

Having read the letter through, Patrick spoke not at all; pressing both hands against his eyes, he sat as one destroyed. Fitz-Harris put his arm round him, held him close with real affection, and said in soft tones: "Take my word for it, she is at Geneva."

Wordlessly and with terrible coldness, Patrick then knelt at the trunk and raised its lid: every article of Deborah's clothing filled it to the brim; he gathered them in his hands and hurled them before Fitz-Harris, crying out:

"There! See what is left of her! Indeed! She is in Geneva, you say? Then why has she left all these things behind? Her gowns, her jewellery? No, I tell you — she is destroyed, never to return! Deborah, my poor girl! Where can you be? The cruel wretches! What has become of you at their hands? Tell me, Fitz — can you not smell her in all these things? They seem to me to be breathing still, as if she were close by. Fitz, what agony this is! Dear God! For a man to speak of his suffering, Fitz — you know this — means he must be enduring something beyond endurance."

Then he collapsed upon that heap of finery, and there he lay motionless for what seemed an age, his face hidden, struggling to conceal his weeping and to silence his sobs.

Having given full vent to his grief, he got to his knees and began lifting each item individually — the veils, the velvets and satins, the ribbons, everything his nerveless body had just trampled — and he flourished them, held them up for Fitz-Harris to see, covered them in kisses, hugged them to himself, spread them in a circle round himself.

"Look, Harris," said he in great distress, "this is the shawl that beat upon her shoulders as angels' wings might beat, that night we last met beside the rushing stream. Here, look — all the black she put on for her mother, her poor, miserable mother! See this dress — her very form is imprinted on it still. Oh, Harris, kiss it for my sake! These silk stockings clothed her tiny feet. Here, the comb that held fast in her locks. Within these sleeves were imprisoned those beautiful white arms of hers, moving always with such gentle grace. These stays encircled her shapely waist as closely as bark cleaves to the living wood; it has known the beating and the heaving of her heart. She breathed such life, such elegance into all these dismal, shapeless tatters! These were all the raiment of her purity; they were its leafy shelter. Purity is like a tree — only the soul's winter and death itself can denude it of its verdure.

"I cannot leave these treasures locked within this trunk; it would be like consigning them to the grave and setting a garden overhead; it would be like closing the book of my love. That book must lie open always, so I can read from it at all times."

Whereupon he gathered up all her clothing and all her adornments, and proceeded to hang them in various spots around the cell — from the walls, from the iron bars that crossed his window-slit.

[1] CARCER TORMENTORUM: Latin, "the prison of torments" or "the hall of examination by torture"; the inscription announces the room's judicial function as a place of formal interrogation under duress.

[2] *Spiorad-naom*: Irish, "Holy Spirit" (*Spiorad Naomh*); Fitz-Harris's exclamation of shocked recognition reaches instinctively for his mother tongue.

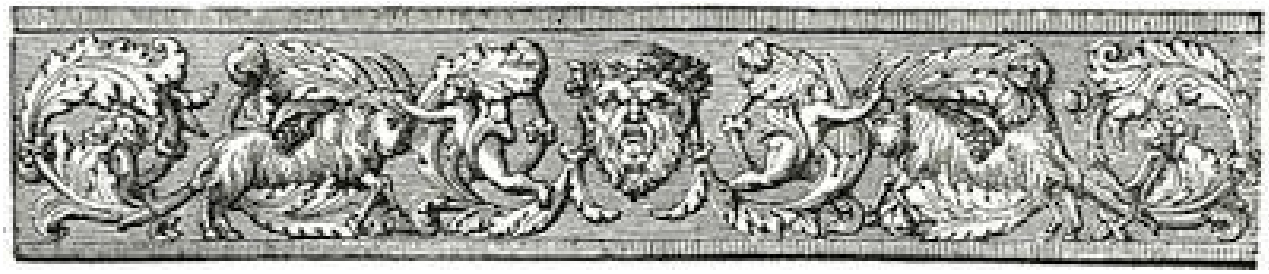
[3] *Dia-an-mac*: Irish, "God the Son" (*Dia an Mac*); the second person of the Trinity invoked in extremity, completing the instinctive theological reflex.

[4] *Mac-Phadruig*: Irish, "son of Patrick" or simply "Patrick" in the vocative Irish form; Fitz-Harris uses the Gaelic name in a moment of naked emotion.

[5] *The Castle of Vincennes*: a medieval royal fortress to the east of Paris, used from the seventeenth century onward as a state prison; its keep was among the most formidable places of detention in France, housing prisoners held by *lettre de cachet* without trial.

[6] *Messageries*: the royal coaching and postal service, responsible for the transport of letters, parcels, and passengers between French cities; the principal departure point in Paris was on the rue Saint-Martin.

[7] Agnès Sorel (1422–1450): known as the *Dame de beauté*, the acknowledged mistress of King Charles VII of France and the first royal favourite to be openly recognised as such; her name became proverbial for seductive beauty.



IX.

The royal Lieutenant was of an enquiring turn, much given to questions; he had, moreover, an uncommon gift for stirring talk into life, for bringing stories to the surface, and for teasing out recollections that might otherwise have lain dormant. Coming as he did with considerable frequency to our two captives, the better to have them speak of Ireland, he was quick to conceive a veritable esteem for the pair, and to become possessed of a sincere attachment to them, born of their youth and the native goodness he perceived in each.

Their characters, to be sure, were not equally handsome — a circumstance the reader cannot have failed to mark — but in fundamental goodness they stood upon an equal footing. Imprudent, inconstant, flighty, harum-scarum, fluttering, superficial, muddleheaded, and slovenly in his ways, Fitz-Harris had every defect attendant upon a mind that exercises no dominion over itself, upon a spirit natural and

guileless in its workings; and this it was, these very imperfections, that won him forgiveness for everything, even for what was entirely blameworthy. Whatever mischief he committed appeared diminished in its malignity; it passed for inadvertence, and he found himself received with smiles, with tolerance, with forgiveness, there where a mind reflective, grave, sensible, and equable — a mind such as Patrick's — would have harvested only resentment and contempt.

Changeable as the sky itself was Fitz-Harris; and resembling some climates, he had but two seasons to his year — spring and winter, May and December, rapture and the blackest spleen. Abruptly he would vault from the most unbridled cheerfulness to the most senseless fit of the dismals. Patrick served as his counterweight. He would suppress his friend's extremities in turn; in turn he would divest him of sentiments or reinvest him with them. The greatest misfortune lay in this: that Fitz-Harris possessed no notion of how to occupy himself. Patrick was much given to reading — whether in volumes or in the pages of his own soul; he wrote, he accumulated learning, he made notes, he occupied himself with drawing. During his spells of consummate joy, Fitz-Harris would talk, sing, dance, pace to and fro, laugh, chatter idly, moon about, potter aimlessly, skulk, shilly-shally, and gambol with Cork; in his momentary fits of despondency he whined like a cayman; he collided with

all things and all things grated upon his nerves; he puffed up with anger born of nothing, picked up a book, studied its binding and threw it aside, lay at full length upon his bed, rested his back against the table, or moved from chair to chair in a silence that was perfectly ridiculous. From day to day, nevertheless, his fits of cheerfulness became less frequent and more fleeting, and at the time of which we now speak, he had fallen prey to a despair that was well-nigh constant.

Upon the 13th of April, in a humour more dejected than he had yet displayed, he wandered restlessly about his eight-sided cell, pacing from wall-section to wall-section, from one corner to the next, reading over and making out afresh — it may have been for the hundredth time — the names, dates, inscriptions, sentences, and lines of verse scratched upon the walls by the hands of wretched men who, in former times, had been immured within these same stones, and whose hands had been, in nearly every instance, guiltless.

Hiems æternum. — 1680.[1]

Never will the hour of liberty sound for me upon any clock. — 1701.

O love of God, most pure!... A month has passed since I became the bride of Jesus Christ. Since this marriage of such high significance, I have abandoned my prayers to the saints, even unto the Blessed Virgin herself, it being unseemly that the mistress of the dwelling should seek

the aid of her spouse's mother or of his domestics. — 1695. — Jeanne-Marie Bouvière-de-la-Motte, Guyon du Quesnoy.[2]

The Count de Thunn. — 1703.

The Count de Thunn. — 1713.[3]

Lenglet-Dufresnoy. — 1725.[4]

1734. — *Claude-Prosper Joliot-de-Crébillon. I pledge myself henceforth to virtue; no more shall I produce such works as* TANZAÏ ET NÉARDANÉ.[5]

Diderot.[6]

Henry Masers de Latude.[7]

Be still, my spirit, and bear your pains in silence and in peace.

Marquis de Mirabeau.[8]

Life rushes past, the confiner and the confined pass away alike. God alone is permanent, and He shall judge.

My release will come when this clock-face marks the destined hour and moment.

The last inscription was still upon Fitz-Harris's lips when M. de Guyonnet burst in, his manner joyful and full of haste.

"News of a happy sort, my friends," he exclaimed. "Most happy news!... Now attend to this. Word has just reached me that Madame Putiphar is taken alarmingly ill, alarmingly so;

the medical men have relinquished all hope. My thought is this: should you write imploring her grace at such a solemn juncture, when she is poised to sink into the grave and appear before her Maker, she could hardly withhold from you forgiveness and pity. — Come, come, not a moment is to be squandered; pen your petitions this very moment, and I shall see them delivered in all haste.... Be quick about it; death keeps vigil by her pillow.... She may even now be no more."

"I thank you a thousand times over, M. de Guyonnet; what goodness is yours!" Fitz-Harris burst out, seizing and kissing his hands.

"Good, good, my boy; there will be time enough for thanks. To your pens; I shall come back presently to fetch what you have written. What's this, Patrick? Bestir yourself, man; what are you about?... We are counting seconds here."

"Thank you, M. de Guyonnet," Patrick said with icy composure. "Generous you may be; generous she is not. Were my deliverance guaranteed, still I would refuse to beg it from her hands. My cause is just, my conscience pure, my hands innocent; wickedness has bound me in fetters. When these fetters are struck off, God shall have my praise! But virtue is unbending — it has no joints to make obeisance to vice. You may go, monsieur; my frame and my soul are schooled in suffering. From my mouth shall come no prayer for grace."

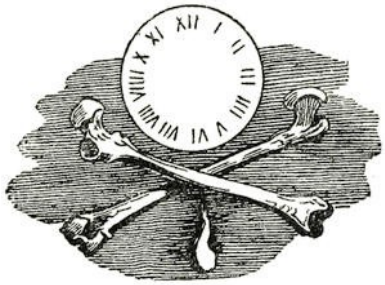
"My dear fellow, you are quite insane."

"That may well be; yet this much is certain — coward I am not."

"Pay him no heed, M. le lieutenant; what of it? I can make appeal enough for two."

"No, Fitz; I will not permit it."

"*Refuse not your brother what you would desire for yourself*. There was a time when you begged grace for me and delivered me from the Bastille; today it is my turn to requite that kindness — I will plead for you, I will deliver you, I will wrest you from this dungeon. I will have it so, brother; brother, the right is mine."



[1] *Hiems æternum*: Latin, "Winter everlasting" — a compressed lament, the seasonal metaphor for imprisonment without end.

[2] Jeanne-Marie Bouvière-de-la-Motte, Guyon du Quesnoy: Madame Guyon (1648–1717), French mystic and proponent of Quietism, the contemplative doctrine that held the soul's perfection to lie in passive abandonment to God; she was imprisoned at Vincennes and later in the Bastille for her teachings, which the Church condemned as heterodox. The inscription given here reflects her doctrine of direct spiritual union with Christ.

[3] *The Count de Thunn:* the repetition of the name across a ten-year gap — 1703 and 1713 — suggests a prisoner held for a decade, whose sole act of self-assertion was to scratch his name again upon the same wall.

[4] *Lenglet-Dufresnoy*: Nicolas Lenglet du Fresnoy (1674–1755), French abbé, historian, and prolific scholar, imprisoned several times for works deemed politically or religiously offensive; his appearances in various royal prisons became something of a running episode in the literary history of the period.

[5] Claude-Prosper Joliot de Crébillon (1707–1777), known as Crébillon *fils* to distinguish him from his celebrated playwright father: French novelist, briefly imprisoned at Vincennes in 1734 following the publication of *Tanzaï et Néadarné, histoire japonaise*, which contained thinly veiled satirical attacks on the Papal bull *Unigenitus* and several prominent figures. He later produced *Les Égarements du cœur et de l'esprit* (1736–38) and *Le Sopha* (1742), the latter forcing him into temporary exile from Paris.

[6] *Diderot*: Denis Diderot (1713–1784), philosopher, novelist, and principal editor of the *Encyclopédie*, was imprisoned at Vincennes in 1749 following the publication of his *Lettre sur les aveugles*; it was during his confinement there that Rousseau famously visited him, an encounter both men later memorialised.

[7] Henry Masers de Latude (1725–1805): French adventurer who gained notoriety by escaping from the Bastille and other royal prisons on multiple occasions after being imprisoned through the influence of Madame de Pompadour; his story became a celebrated cause in the years leading to the Revolution, and his memoirs were widely read.

[8] *Marquis de Mirabeau*: Victor de Riqueti, Marquis de Mirabeau (1715–1789), economist and physiocrat, known as *l'Ami des hommes* after the title of his most celebrated work; imprisoned at Vincennes in 1760 at the instigation of his own family — an irony given that his son, the great Revolutionary orator Honoré-Gabriel, was himself confined there in 1777.

X.

A Petition Humbly Submitted by Fitz-Harris to Madame Putiphar.

Madame,

God's hand afflicts you in your palace; your hand afflicts me in my prison-cell; I implore Heaven for your sake and implore you for my own, coming thus in spirit to throw myself at your feet. Madame, even the infant newly come into the world is ripe enough for dying; you, who count more than a score of years, may find death waiting upon your threshold unannounced. When once she has arrived, there will be no time left for you to do me that justice which none but yourself can give, and so you would pursue me with persecution past your very death — which Heaven forfend! Madame, to pardon is incumbent upon us all: can it be your desire that I should sully your posthumous fame by reporting that you were implacable to the last? There is a time appointed when we must put aside our harshness and our

cruelty; it comes when our nearing dissolution constrains us to plunge into the obscure depths of conscience, there to feel compassion for all the sorrows, sufferings, calamities and woes we have visited upon our brethren; you may, Madame, be touching upon that moment even now; and yet you are aware that for months upon months you have caused me to languish and die a thousand deaths within the Keep, where the most treacherous of the King's subjects might still warrant some measure of mercy and fellow-feeling; how infinitely more deserving, then, am I of such consideration, who gave you so small and so unmeant an injury, and who now beseech your forgiveness over and over past all counting, throwing myself upon the goodness and the charity of your heart. Ah! if you could hear but once the sobbing, the complaints and the mournful sounds you force from my lips, how speedily would you command that I should be liberated! Madame, to forgive is our Christian duty. Towards you my heart has been at all times modest and full of respect, and more profoundly modest and respectful would it remain should I find myself indebted for my precious liberty to your goodness and your grace.

Madame, to forgive is our Christian duty. To die, to be laid within the grave — this is the fate we all must share; but to be buried living, as you have buried me, within a prison of stone — oh, what cruelty lies therein! Madame, I am a mere boy; twenty years is all my age; I am a perfect simpleton: in

every deed I have performed, whether creditable or shameful, I have been guided by nothing but youthful frivolity; you must not judge me as a serious man. Nothing am I, nothing upon this earth! I am less than a sound already perished, less than a spark now dead, less than a strand of spider's silk drifting in the autumn wind; I am merely a scrap of dried straw.... Can you truly believe I carry any gravity in the scales that measure out your future? How admirably suited I am to serve as the crowbar that brings a throne crashing down! Madame, but say that this worthless scrap of chaff should be tossed out of doors... the breeze will snatch it up, and it shall vanish into the great tumult of the world.

Madame, the Christian duty is to pardon. I have lived but twenty years. Ah! could you know how fiercely I love this life of mine, you would give it back to me. There is no peril in allowing me to live, I give you my word; each sentiment that moves me is innocent and kind. I am a youth of twenty. Were you aware of the intensity of my affection for women; were you to know that my devotion to them borders upon idolatrous reverence, that my respect and polite consideration reach out even to women sunk in vice and degradation, you could never suppose that against you, so illustrious, so comely, so lofty in station, so universally praised, so fully deserving of all praise, I should have entertained malicious thoughts. No, Madame, whatever stirrings

your graces and your bravery have roused within my heart have invariably been such as are most foreign to hatred.

Madame, the Christian duty is to pardon. By the everlasting God who shall one day sit in judgement over us both, who will judge you just as you now judge me; if you wish Him to be merciful towards you, be merciful towards me! Take pity upon my wretched soul! take pity upon my wretched flesh! take pity upon my torments!

By that God who formed you in such loveliness, Madame, command that these fetters be removed from me!

Madame, to forgive is our Christian duty. Imprisoned beneath the same ceiling, linked to the same cruel chain, there suffers without a word my friend, my brother, my beloved Patrick, the selfsame Patrick who once received from your hands the pardon of my error; I beg you, Madame, to turn upon him all the pleadings I have just made to you in my own cause! have the goodness to proceed as if a double petition, uttered in unison, had reached your ears! I would fain make good my duty to him. Grant me his freedom, Madame, in the name of your brother whom you love so well, in the name of the Marquis de Marigny[1]*! Display your bounty of heart; extend forgiveness to him! If you will be charitable to me, be yet more charitable to him, I beg of you! Dared I speak freely, feared I not to injure your feelings, I would make known to you how precious he is.... Grace! grant grace to him, Madame! As you love your brother,*

have pity on my brother, Madame! If it should be impossible for you to perform both these mercies; if your heart were incapable of this dual generosity; if your pity could cast its protecting mantle over one alone of us and abandon the other to the cold, then I beseech you, Madame, think no more of me and bestow all upon Patrick.

Madame, make my liberation subject to any proviso you think fit; let it be as harsh as you wish, I will comply as though it were Heaven's own command: I will transform myself into your true and faithful slave, performing my service upon my knees, and pass my nights prostrate across your doorstep. I will depart from France never to return. Should you perish of the sickness that has taken hold of you, I shall bear your mourning for the remainder of my days, and for as long as Providence allows me breath I will visit your tomb daily to offer prayers on bended knee!

Pity! pity!... Lying flat upon the ground, I cry for pity!... Madame, these walls will be the death of me; misery has already laid me waste.... Oh! how precious would be the sight of a tree again, of a simple meadow herb, a bird, a horse;... to have the notes of a harpsichord fall upon my ears, to hold tight the hand of a woman!... the hand of one who loves me!...

Madame, one has a duty to forgive. I have an aged mother, one and seventy years old and in poverty, who has need of my support, and who reckons her hours, as I do mine, in weeping.

Madame, deign to put an end to our desolation; I have ever desired good fortune for you, and in recognition of your mercy I shall continue to desire it until my dying day.

Pity for Patrick, Madame, pity for me! pity by all you hold dear in your brother!

I am, and shall ever be, with utmost veneration, regard and complete submission,

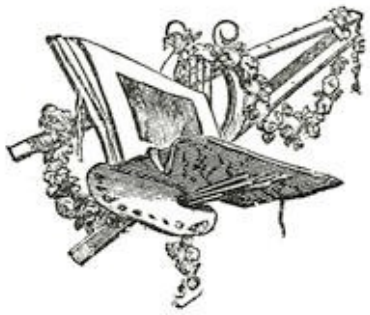
Madame,

Your most humble and most obedient

servant and subject,

Fitz-Harris.

From the Donjon Tower, this 13th April, 1764. — Come the 29th of this same month, when the clock strikes eleven at night, it shall be, Madame, five thousand and eighty-eight hours since you first consigned me to this agony.



[1] *The Marquis de Marigny*: Abel-François Poisson de Vandières, Marquis de Marigny (1727–1781), younger brother of Madame de Pompadour and Directeur des Bâtiments du Roi under Louis XV; he was genuinely close to his sister and retained considerable influence at Court even after her death. Fitz-Harris's appeal to fraternal affection — invoking Putiphar's love for her brother to awaken compassion for his own bond with Patrick — is among the most pointed strokes in the petition.

XI.

The day but one after this, M. de Guyonnet presented himself, attended by a man of the cloth — the curé from the Magdelène church. This clergyman had ministered to Madame Putiphar at Versailles as she lay dying, and she had given into his keeping a letter, scarcely minutes before the end came.

A flame of hope rekindled itself in Fitz-Harris's breast. All a-tremble with warring passions, he tore open the seal, darted one swift look at what was written, and pitched over backwards in a dead faint.

XII.

The royal château of Versailles,
the 14th of April, 1764.

To Messieurs Fitz-Harris and Patrick Fitz-Whyte.

NO.

Your most devoted servant,

PUTIPHAR.

BOOK THE SIXTH.

XIII.

A full year had all but elapsed since Deborah penned her missive to Sir John Chatsworth, her guardian, and from him she had heard not a word.

She had endured the silence initially with such patience as only the captive knows; but little by little, drop upon drop, dread and despair filtered through into her heart. Only woeful and dispiriting conclusions presented themselves to explain the silence: her letter had failed to arrive, or Sir John Chatsworth had wilfully abandoned her to her fate, or death had claimed him. In her sorrow, Monsieur de Cogolin did all in his power to comfort and strengthen her. Noble Samaritan that he was, he dressed her spirit's hurts with soothing balm and kept alive, with fresh oil, the all-but-extinguished flame of her hope. Yet her greatest source of strength, her chief refuge from affliction, lay in the tender cares and deep affections that belong to the mother's heart.

Round about that time, and wholly unforeseen, there came to the fortress a person who announced himself as Lord Cunnyngham and demanded to be taken before the governor.

Once Monsieur the governor and this newcomer had spent a fair interval in private discourse, word was sent for Deborah.

I know not if some inward prompting revealed the truth to her, but she came running in happy haste and cast herself straightway, and without a moment's doubt, into the arms of the stranger, sobbing and exclaiming, "Uncle! My own good uncle! — Sir John has caused me such anguish by abandoning me to this endless silence! Now that you are come, however, I put it all from my mind. — Uncle, beloved uncle, bless you for having graciously remembered my plight, for bestowing a measure of your compassion upon one so wretched as I!"

Not only did Monsieur de Cogolin conceive no shadow of mistrust, but he was himself much stirred by witnessing such heartfelt affection.

Once the first passionate embraces and confidences were exchanged, Lord Cunnyngham called sharply, "John! Thom!" — and in came a pair of scarlet-clad servants, all bedizened with braid and gilt, each one carrying a parcel containing those articles Deborah had so pressingly asked to be brought

for the making of gifts. The choicest of these gifts she bestowed immediately upon the governor, keeping back what was left for bestowal upon both prisoners and their keepers. Her purpose in making these gifts was to show her appreciation for the tender care and goodness of Monsieur de Cogolin, for the offices of the turnkeys, for the compassion shown her by the miserable wretches who moaned beneath those gloomy arches; yet chiefly she hoped thus to dispose their minds favourably towards her and make them more amenable to persuasion if ever necessity should so require.

Kissing her hands repeatedly, the governor showered Deborah with every tender phrase that might convey the measure of his grateful feelings. Lord Cunnyngham also received his respectful compliments, and presently the governor went so far as to suggest, with considerable trepidation, that if no pressing duty obliged him to leave the island immediately, he would esteem himself unspeakably honoured were his lordship willing to become his guest.

"Evening is upon us," he went on, "may I prevail upon you to dine, and to pass the night beneath my roof?"

Such an offer fitted their plans too admirably to be turned away. Deborah embraced the whole proposal, and craved leave of Monsieur de Cogolin to give, in her turn, a sumptuous breakfast the next morning — before her uncle should quit the island — for himself and every one of his

prisoners, the cost of which she desired to defray. Taking up a purse Lord Cunnyngham had that moment delivered into her keeping, she drew a fistful of gold coins and threw them onto the table, asking Monsieur the governor to give them to his major-domo and to have him wait upon her, so that she might make all necessary arrangements for the feast.

Monsieur de Cogolin made a polite bow to show his acquiescence.

Taking the unknown gentleman by the hand, Deborah led him away to her prison chamber.

Once within, she flung herself down at his feet, overcome with rapturous delight, and declared with deep feeling:

"Allow me, sir, to reveal to you in all sincerity those genuine feelings your selfless service has stirred within my heart — feelings I was just now obliged to counterfeit in that little performance. You are our saviour, sir — mine and my son's! My poor little one, born in chains, shall no more forget than I the burden of gratitude we owe you from this moment forward. Sir, I have no knowledge of the terms Mister Chatsworth may have settled with you, but of this be confident: that whatever they are, I shall make them good in double measure. I can never, by any means whatever, fully acquit myself of what I owe you."

"My lady, I possess little in the way of worldly goods; yet Providence has seen fit to grant me a wealth of noble sentiment, in which I glory. The service I render you now carries no charge whatever: madam, I will accept nothing in return for setting you free. What brought me to this place was not any expectation of benefit, but simply the knowledge of your distress. Your written plea to Sir John Chatsworth reached me, madam, and I could not remain unmoved. Two-thirds of my days will shortly be exhausted, madam, and still I have lived without doing one thing worthy of honour. My days were void of purpose; the reason for my being here was a mystery to me: now, at last, my life has found its meaning. Some forty years ago a boy-child entered life in a wretched cabin in County Sligo, and all that time was leading him to this hour, when he might become the very hammer to burst asunder the chains imprisoning a young mother. Payment would rob my deed of all its nobility, madam: I entreat you not to take that from me; this redemption is something I need most urgently."

"Sir, I admire you beyond measure, and I should be charmed to vie with you in magnanimity; but this worthy duel must wait. Let us now concentrate every effort upon the actual execution of our scheme. The files I mentioned, sir — have you got them?"

"I have them here, my lady."

"Excellent. Our entire venture depends upon these, but the enterprise is not a whit less sound for that. See here, and say to what fragile things our fortunes are attached? Were it not for the tiny, scarcely discernible teeth upon this frail bit of steel, I should likely be left to waste away within these walls instead of winning back my freedom and my very existence as I now shall. Can we be shocked that necessity sets honour and justice at naught, when necessity upends everything, when it disorders reason, merit, and the true proportion between creatures and their world? It drives the starving wretch to prize a crust above his honour, precisely as it compels me in this instant to exalt the rough wit of some nameless smith — who first imagined steel might gnaw through steel — infinitely above the towering genius of Dante and Shakespeare. This bit of metal is worth more to me than all of Milton! Would not such impiety, uttered in the hearing of judges who enjoy their liberty and have no need of a file, be enough to have me hauled before the headsman — even as the hapless beggar who sets a crust of bread above honour and right is condemned by well-fed judges whose bellies are full of the essence of sumptuous viands? Put every man back where he belongs, and all wrongs will be righted. Let my judges be captives like myself, and I shall win acquittal; or grant me freedom, and I shall rank Milton above the file, the poet above the smith; or let the pauper be tried by starving

judges, and he too shall go free; or feed him well, and he will put honour before his crust.

"This, my lord, is the design for our deliverance that I have developed at great length in captivity, preferring it to every other course: its virtue lies in its simplicity. Keep to it rigorously, I entreat you, and full success will be ours.

"My lord — for so I am happy to address you, sir — you will quit this place tomorrow the instant breakfast is done, and return forthwith to La Napoule.[1] Put to sea and ply your course in such wise that you come to this place, the better to ensure success, only around the middle of the night; make your approach on the island's seaward side, at the mouth of the channel, have all your armed sailors go ashore, and post them along the waterline as watchmen, ready to spring into action at a moment's notice. Then, with none but a handful of fellows bearing the ladders, and moving in complete silence, you must make your way stealthily, like a stalking beast, to that side of the fortress which faces the setting sun. Even in the gloom, my window will be plain to see; I shall dangle a scarf from the bars. To scale the distance to it, the ladder should be roughly forty feet long. Leave the rest to me. Before morning I will have sawn partway through one bar, leaving it so weakened that a single knock will snap it. Move with cunning, but let there be no want of resolution. Be not alarmed; the watch kept here is slight, as will be plain to you.

A few broken-down veterans — that is all the garrison amounts to. When darkness falls, a mere pair of sentries are on duty; one keeps the platform, the other minds the entrance. As a rule their firelocks carry no charge; and it commonly happens that one is sightless and his fellow hard of hearing. Should they, by some mischance, give the alert and challenge you with 'Who's there?' — answer them not. If they turn hostile, do not so much as budge. If those in the guardhouse stir and come out to oppose you, overpower the men and dispose of them as you see fit. Yet pray do not slay the poor souls; there must be no spilling of blood. I tell you, you may set your heart at rest — no one will trouble us. Trust me when I say the commotion of our leaving will not be what wakes them."

This counterfeit Lord Cunnyngham was in truth one Icolm-Kill.[2]

This man had once kept an alehouse in County Sligo, but having become entangled in certain troubles with the Boys[3] — I know not if it was the affair of the White, the Steel, the Oak, or the Peep-of-day faction — his establishment was burnt down and he was obliged to take flight to escape being strung up without the formality of a trial, a fate routinely meted out in those times. He had gone to sea to ward off penury, and had been by turns a trader in slaves, a buccaneer, and a harpooner after the great leviathans. The publican's

habits blended with the tar's rolling stride rendered him a fairly ludicrous amalgam, especially when got up in his velvet jacket and gold-threaded waistcoat. But the circumstance of his being a foreigner set everything right, and would have atoned for a good deal more. There is nothing in the world so advantageous as being from abroad!

Sir John Chatsworth had known him of old as a fellow of warm heart and stout nerve, and, entertaining the utmost confidence in his resourcefulness, had readily ventured to commit to him a task so fraught with difficulty and to put the invaluable welfare of his ward under his protection.

All night long Deborah laboured in a kind of waking dream, contorted into the most agonising posture, crouching over her narrow window embrasure whilst she sawed at both ends of a huge iron rod that she had wrapped carefully in flannel, as one might dress a wound, to smother the screech of the file against metal. So lengthy and gruelling was the task that her frail form was left aching and spent, whilst her fair, soft hands suffered ruthless injury.

The next day, from the break of dawn, all within the stronghold was alive with activity. Attired in their most presentable rags, the inmates roamed the passageways and moved between the dungeons, hailing each other merrily and swapping jovial pleasantries. Anxious lest their stomachs should fail them, a few had actually climbed to the ramparts

and uppermost battlements to work up a proper appetite. In the rigid, featureless round of cell life, in the grey, mind-numbing monotony of the dungeon, the slightest happening becomes a matter of intense feeling.

Ahead of breakfast, Monsieur de Cogolin asked Lord Cunnyngham if he would care to view the Fort-Réal and make a leisurely round of the island.

Icolm-Kill took shrewd advantage of the tour to assess the defenders, the pathways, and the castle's situation, and to determine which spot on the island of Frioul would serve best for his night-time disembarkation.

At the dining table, the quondam publican was made to install himself upon a species of throne that had been got up for him with great pomp. He was served as if he were a sovereign, and he radiated all the dignity thereof: the most fumbling of his movements, the most clumsy of his words, provoked wonderment.

Toast after toast was drunk in his honour, and the fellow who succeeded in knocking his tumbler against the great man's vessel counted himself supremely fortunate. When the sweet course was served, he rose and offered a toast to the flourishing of France and her most luckless sister Ireland — a sentiment that met with enthusiastic approval — then asked leave to depart, explaining to Monsieur de Cogolin that rather

than proceeding straightway to Sinigaglia, where he held the position of consul to the English trading community, he had determined to repair with all speed to Versailles and throw himself at the King's feet for his niece's release, assuring him that though he should not show his face again without having won her liberty, he anticipated rejoining him as his guest in a matter of days.

The entire assembly rose and, determined to show him every courtesy, stubbornly insisted on seeing him off.

The old campaigners of the fort, who had been richly favoured by Deborah's largesse, came lurching and stumbling along as well, arms at the ready, to mingle with the throng.

When Lord Cunnyngham, straddling shore and boat with one foot planted on each, bent to kiss Deborah's brow before leaping aboard, a salvo of musket-fire crackled through the air accompanied by enthusiastic roars of "Long live Lord Cunnyngham! Long live Lady Deborah! Long live Ireland!"

"Long live France!" Icolm-Kill shouted in return.

Heading east into the Gulf of Juan, the boat cleared Cap-Gros and before long was swallowed up behind the jutting promontory.

By nightfall, the whole fortress had sunk into repose; Deborah, determined to keep her wits about her, had sampled the provisions and liquor most sparingly. The gaoler, who had

clearly not followed her example of abstinence, forgot in his befuddlement to secure her dungeon door, and she was compelled to prop it shut from within using her two little benches and her bed-frame lest anyone should stumble in.

In the first hours after dark, she completed cutting through the rod she had begun attacking the night before, and worked at it with her file until it was held in place by scarcely more than an iron whisker.

Taking up her kerchief, she draped it at the window where it billowed like a flag, providing in the blackness both a marker and a guiding light.

Next she inscribed a note and deposited it on the table, to be read by Monsieur de Cogolin:

"God grant His succour to His servant!

The highest duty of one in chains is to snap those chains asunder: You are, my noble and generous friend, of too exalted a nature to fault me for having honoured this duty. You must believe me — I have undertaken this with a heavy heart. One endures extraordinary pain in playing false with a man of honour such as yourself. Who in all the world merits greater respect? And yet, in these circumstances, I was powerless to act as my heart would have me do. Possessed as I was by the fiend of liberty, which laughs at chains and stone walls alike, could I

do otherwise than ride roughshod over all proprieties? Beyond all this, I am not mine own: a mother is beholden to her child.

I own it is so — you took such pains on my behalf; you enveloped me in such gracious consideration; your compassion so nobly eased the weight of my suffering and so thoroughly masked the horrible aspect of my destiny, that my circumstances were not entirely insupportable. Unhappily, men of your character are few and far between, and do not come one after the other. Not that I would steer you towards gloomy contemplation or remind you of your grey head: by no means; may Providence grant you the longest and most gracious evening of life — that is my heart's desire! But from this hour to the next, is it not in the ordinary course of things that you could be taken from us? What if, in place of Trajan, Tiberius had followed[4]*— should I not then have been delivered over to villainy just as fully as I was given over to your charity?*

I depart with a fond, an invaluable, a sacred memory of you that will remain forever in my loyal heart.

All the gratitude a daughter's heart is capable of feeling is yours, my father; pray bless her."

When she had done this, she knelt down by her child's little bed and petitioned the Good Shepherd to guard the mother-sheep and her young, the widow and the fatherless

child: she besought God to grant her the same divine favour that had been shown to Hagar and Ishmael,[5] and pleaded for a guardian Angel to steer her undertaking and see it safely to triumph.

She remained on her feet, aquiver with nervous tension, stock-still, her ear flat against the window and her hand formed into a cone and cupped over it so as to broaden the receiver and double the acuteness of her listening, and she marked eleven, then midnight, then one in the morning.... She waited to no purpose! Her deliverer was nowhere to be seen. Nothing met her ears save the wash and swell of the sea beaten by a furious north-westerly gale, together with the moaning of seals at play upon the shore, plunging and surfacing.

At length the nightingale appeared, embroidering its liquid variations upon that steady, droning bass. Hearing that song, she became agitated and she knelt down again to steady her nerves by praying.

Dark misgivings swept over her mind without warning: since that bird had sung when she first reached the outskirts of Paris, where so much calamity was to befall her, it had become, to her superstitious sensibility, a harbinger of doom.

All at once she let out a shriek of fright.

Glancing upward, she had caught sight of a dark shape stirring and silhouetted against the blue vault of heaven beyond her window.

"Quiet, my lady, quiet; be not afraid — 'tis I, Icolm-Kill."

"Ah! 'Tis you, my lord! God be praised for your coming!"

In a paroxysm of gratitude, Deborah flung herself against the casement and kissed again and again the hand of Cunnyngham which was working loose the filed bar. The bar gave way at the very first tap of a mallet.

"All is going just as we hoped, my lady. Not a single person have we seen or heard. The night is black as pitch: come now, your deliverance is at hand! Keep your wits about you; you must have steady nerves and nimbleness to squeeze through this narrow gap and climb down this lengthy rope-ladder, which quivers under one's weight and pitches about like the rigging of a ship. Steady now, my lady, steady — we must be quick!"

Deborah eased her child from his little bed and swaddled him completely in a mantle to muffle any sound were he to stir; she then entrusted him to Icolm-Kill with the gentlest and most anxious cautions a mother could give.

Next she lowered herself onto the ladder and came down with indescribable agility and poise; and, swifter than the gazelle, more desperate than the lioness following whoever

has stolen her cub, she rushed in Cunnyngham's wake through tangled groves of phillyrea, mastic, and buckthorn; and having traversed a clearing fragrant with lavender, she gained the old stable-house.

There a group of seafaring men, looking for all the world like Moors, stood leaning on their long-barrelled guns and watching the strand.

Catching sight of Deborah, they could not contain their joyous outcry. Every man fell to the ground, and Deborah likewise cast herself prone upon the sand.

Never had any psalm been more reverent, never had any incense mounted to the Almighty more unsullied and gracious, than this wordless thanksgiving.

Next they leapt into the longboats, came alongside the sloop, unfurled the sails, and with all the rapidity of a sea-rover, struck out for the high seas.

Deborah would accept no sleep, and together with all the sailors she kept to the ship's deck, watching for the break of day, that she might consecrate the day of her release and behold the new-risen sun bathing her freedom in golden light.

A score of centuries past, when Dionysius the Tyrant had been driven out, the citizens of Syracuse had rendered this moving tribute to the sun, going forth to salute it as it rose, that they might tell it freedom had dawned at last and swear

that from that day forward it would shine upon no nation but a liberated one.[6]

The moment the watchmen called down from the crow's nests, "The sun! The sun! The sun!" and heaven's king had raised his glorious head above the distant line and shaken loose his gilded mane upon the waters, Deborah took up her boy in both hands and, bearing him aloft with fierce pride, brought him face to face with that blazing sphere.

And the whole company of mariners, brandishing their hats and setting their scarves flying, intoned with grave earnestness this anthem to their native land:

Ireland, our mother, you suffer, the Englishman has bound you in fetters; yet ever you remain fair! yet ever do we love you!

Between your breasts he has buried a knife, and unceasingly he turns it in the bleeding wound; your blood commingles with your milk, your weeping with your lifeblood.

Ireland, our mother, you suffer, the Englishman has bound you in fetters; yet ever you remain fair! yet ever do we love you!

On the far horizon, there dawns a day for emerald Erin, wherein Freedom shall plunge her hand into the British lion's jaws, and delve into its very bowels to wrench out its beating heart.

Ireland, our mother, you suffer, the Englishman has bound you in fetters; yet ever you remain fair! yet ever do we love you!

[1] *La Napoule*: a small coastal town and harbour some twelve kilometres west of Cannes, well placed as a discreet base for a night-time approach to the Lérins Islands.

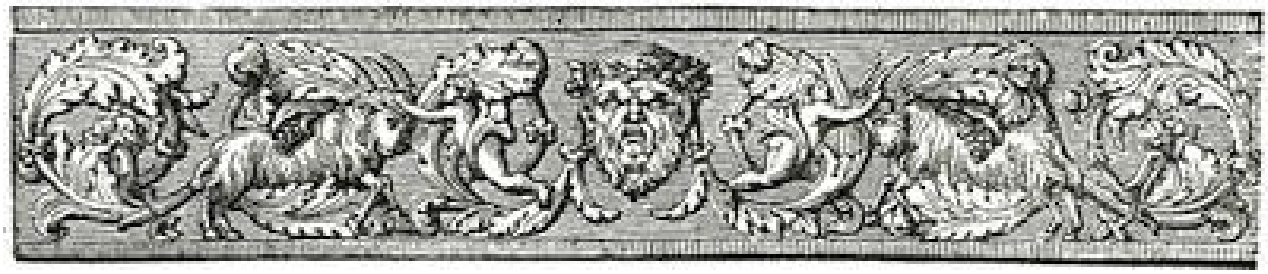
[2] *Icolm-Kill*: the Gaelic name for the island of Iona (*Ì Chaluim Chille*, "the island of Columba of the Church"), the sacred Scottish island associated with Saint Columba, who brought Christianity to Scotland from Ireland in the sixth century; the choice of this name for the Irish rescuer carries a quiet resonance of the old Gaelic world.

[3] *The Boys*: the various agrarian secret societies active in eighteenth-century Ireland who organised resistance to tithes, enclosures, and rack-renting. The Whiteboys, who emerged in the 1760s, wore white shirts over their clothing during night-time raids; the Steelboys were active in Ulster in 1769–1772, protesting rising rents; the Oakboys, or Hearts of Oak, arose in 1763 over road-maintenance taxes; the Peep-of-Day Boys, active from the 1780s, were a Protestant faction conducting dawn raids on Catholic homes. All were subject to harsh suppression, including summary execution.

[4] *Trajan and Tiberius*: Trajan (ruled AD 98–117) was celebrated in Roman tradition as one of the most just and benevolent of emperors; Tiberius (ruled AD 14–37) earned a reputation, particularly in his later years, for suspicion, cruelty, and tyranny. Deborah's point is that however humane her present gaoler may be, no prisoner can rely upon the humanity of whoever might succeed him.

[5] *Hagar and Ishmael*: in Genesis 21, Hagar and her son Ishmael are cast out into the wilderness by Abraham at Sarah's insistence; in their extremity, God hears the child's cry and reveals a well of water, promising to make of Ishmael a great nation. The story is an archetype of the outcast mother sustained by divine providence.

[6] *Dionysius the Tyrant and the sun of Syracuse*: a reference to the expulsion of Dionysius II of Syracuse in 344 BC.



XIV.

What is a woman's heart when wounded? And what, more terrible still, is the black heart of a black-natured woman smarting under an affront? Of these mysteries, the poor, deluded wretch Fitz-Harris possessed not the remotest understanding. In his folly, he had permitted himself to suppose that Madame Putiphar's severity would not be absolute where he was concerned. His thinking had run in this fashion: Such humility as mine displays, such complete abasement before her, must surely work upon her heart — upon any woman's heart, however implacable her nature. What folly was his! Therefore the short, merciless answer that came from the favourite upon her deathbed caught him, as we have seen, like the thrust of a poniard he had never seen coming. Patrick, however, was too shrewd by half, and understood human nature too completely, to have permitted himself even a moment's indulgence in so chimerical a notion. Upon him, that fatal single word wrought

not the least perturbation. Indeed, he appeared so entirely untroubled that a beholder might have imagined he had himself pronounced that terrible syllable and inscribed it with his own pen. There was no bringing Fitz-Harris's wandering wits back to composure or to reason: he persisted in his desolation, proof against all comfort. Say what one would, he believed himself undone, believed his freedom to be irretrievably gone. A ghastly conviction seized him: the door of the Keep, he thought, had just been bricked over; he had, he believed, just been joined in some hideous nuptial contract with his dungeon's stones and with his chains — a marriage indissoluble, perpetual, to be sundered only by the grave.

The excellent M. de Guyonnet, always a man of honour, behaved during this episode in a manner beyond all praise. Much affected by witnessing Fitz-Harris's bitter anguish, he at once set about uniting his endeavours with those which Patrick, in brotherly affection, was already bestowing, that together they might lift the sufferer from his despair. No variety of comforting expression did he fail to contribute, building upon the tender attentions and reassurances Patrick was so liberally dispensing. It seemed to cost him no trouble whatever to make promises, yet M. de Guyonnet's word was never given idly — he unfailingly delivered more than he had engaged to do, to say nothing of the circumstance that his unsolicited benefactions exceeded even what he had formally

undertaken. Most notably from that time forth, I know of no instance in which our prisoners sought some grace from him without receiving it, nor was there any privilege within his official capacity which he failed to extend to them. Indeed, he would occasionally anticipate what they desired before they asked, and humoured Fitz-Harris's petulant caprices with the sort of weakness one sees in an overindulgent parent. Once he had delivered our two prisoners from that first subterranean chamber where they had been as good as buried, he permitted them, the better to speed their convalescence, one hour daily in which to take the air among the garden walks. Such solicitude was as uncommon as it was gracious; but his generosity did not stop there: he gave Fitz-Harris leave, by way of diversion from his low spirits, to walk about the Keep's upper platform, a vantage point affording the most magnificent and far-reaching of prospects. Occasionally he would remonstrate with him mildly; to shame him back into courage he accused him of cowardice, and undertook to prove — or made every effort to prove — that it was too soon for desperation, that Madame Putiphar's rejection ought to be dismissed as insignificant since her dominion had ended, and that her animosity, stubborn though it might be, could scarcely outlast her mortal span or extend its malign influence into the hereafter. Once, prompted by these reflections, he tried to prevail upon Patrick to address a

petition of his own to the Lieutenant-General of Police; but Patrick would not hear of it.

And wise he was in his refusal.

What, after all, would have come of it? M. de Sartine,[1] that contemptible mountebank masquerading as a magistrate, would have told him — supposing, against all likelihood, that the fellow had deigned to respond at all — something to this effect for his own case: "Madame Putiphar has indeed gone down into the tomb, yet you are bound all the same to atone entirely for your assault upon the King's majesty in the person of her who served him." Then, respecting his comrade's situation, he would doubtless have received that same dismal and degrading formula which had been dinned for eleven years into the ears of an honourable gentleman crushed under the double weight of advancing years and iron shackles, wasting away beneath the very same vaulted ceilings for a misdeed closely akin to that charged against Fitz-Harris: "You have either written these offending verses yourself, or you possess knowledge of him who has; if the second be true, your stubborn silence makes you just as guilty: give us his name, and you walk free." Even were Fitz-Harris the sort of man to contemplate so degrading an action, he would have been no more able to deliver up the information than was Pompignan de Mirabel:[2] for that was how the elderly prisoner was called.

When Madame Putiphar died, there came — thing atrocious, thing senseless, thing beyond belief! — not even the most trifling improvement in the appalling circumstances of those poor devils who lay festering in every prison of State because she had willed it so. Not one man in the Keep threw off his irons, not one watched his bolts slide back, not a solitary soul, I tell you! Not the Baron de Venac, holding a captaincy in the regiment of Picardy, who had expiated for ten long years the fault of presenting her with information which, even as it bore upon her safety, risked mortifying her amour-propre; nor the Chevalier de la Rocheguerault, who came from the Welsh territories of England and was arrested in Amsterdam, imprisoned these seventeen years — Lord above! — in that dismal keep upon the grounds that he was believed to have composed a broadsheet, *The Voice of the Persecuted*, that had once annoyed Madame the favourite; a piece of writing the poor wretch had never so much as encountered; nor yet another gentleman, a native of Montpellier, the name of whom I have forgotten; nor a full twenty more I should be quite incapable of naming.... There are mysteries in tyranny which no man can pierce.

With what satisfaction must Patrick have reflected that he had not allowed himself to be swayed by M. de Guyonnet's recommendation! With what approval must he have regarded his decision to remain silent when, at some later date, word

reached him — as it surely did — of Henry Masers de Latude's[3] removal from the Bastille to the Keep, and his strict and merciless reconfinement by order of the Lieutenant-General.

Patrick's soothing words and M. de Guyonnet's devoted efforts were surpassed in efficacy by another remedy altogether; what did most to lift Fitz-Harris from his state of melancholy — what positively cured him of it — was a parcel from his uncle, the Abbé de Saint-Spire de Corbeil, which came to hand toward the end of that year. A brief time after the refusal and the passing of the Putiphar, whilst his sorrow was at its most acute, Fitz-Harris had penned him a remarkable letter, frenzied from beginning to end, relating the story of his misfortune.

The abbé in question, this authentic man of the cloth, was a plain and upright soul who had nurtured Fitz-Harris from boyhood and loved him with a full heart. Profoundly moved by the disasters that had befallen his nephew, he had thus conveyed to him, by way of response, a letter replete with loving sympathy and fervent consolation: for one encounters occasionally — though God distributes them with a niggard hand — certain hearts upon which the misery of others makes a cut, much as a tool scores the palm's outer layer, and which, after the manner of that Eastern tree, let flow from the breach a wine of surpassing generosity. The

amity of this person, unlike that which passes for friendship in most quarters, extended well beyond rhetorical abundance: his tongue was more measured than his hands were open. In a word, his letter — wherein he pledged to labour unceasingly and to bring to bear every ounce of his influence and energy in extracting Fitz-Harris from those cruel spikes of enmity on which, wretched youth, his life had been so tragically impaled — this letter, I repeat, came with an accompaniment more eloquent than words: a small sack containing fifteen hundred livres.

In the gladness of his heart, Fitz-Harris took up the entire amount, made a pile of it, and portioned it into thirds: one for his old mother, one for Patrick, one for himself. The share intended for his mother was sent off without delay. Patrick, exercising that nicety of feeling so characteristic of him, refused his third.

"My gentle friend," said he to Fitz-Harris, "nothing stands between our friendship and our common lot; why then should we carve up the field of our misery or plant hedges in it. All that is mine, all I could wish for, is yours; all that is yours, all you could wish for, is mine: there is nothing more to be said. We sit by the same hearth, we eat at the same board, we are confined under the same arch — be at peace, do what you will, my brother, I shall be there as your fellow guest, depend upon it."

Having retained two-thirds of the sum, Fitz-Harris was as puzzled over the use of his funds as a youngster might be who finds himself at a fair with a handful of coppers to call his own. The gravity of this concern preoccupied him to such a degree that he lapsed into total speechlessness. The whole day long he sat brooding over it, elbows planted on either side of his little fortune, and brooded over it still when night came. In the end, come the next day:

"I have pretty well made up my mind," he told Patrick in high spirits, "unless you advise otherwise; this is what I have resolved, and what must be procured before all other considerations. In the first place, a collar of silver for Cork, a big stoneware flagon of Flemish make, a pair of Japanese pots, some pictures, and a harpsichord."

This recital brought a smile to Patrick's lips, which he could not restrain; he took Fitz-Harris by the hand and gave it an affectionate squeeze.

"Splendidly thought out!" "Every item is charming," he declared, "absolutely delightful! Yet, my dear fellow, ought we not to reflect upon the basic wants that may afflict our bodies and our minds ere we lavish upon ourselves all these articles of luxury?"

These words — "articles of luxury" — seemed to strike athwart Fitz-Harris's thinking and put him out.

"Luxuries!" he cried. "What, pray, constitutes a luxury in your estimation? A collar for Cork? Ages have passed since I gave him my word he should have a fine one! A piece of Flemish stoneware to take the place of that wretched water jug of ours? That is hardly a luxurious item. That half-pound of tobacco the King supplies us each month is always getting scattered here and there and wasted; one Japanese pot for its safekeeping and another for daisies and roses — I can hardly call that lavish spending; what's more, I have such a love of handsome vessels! Such a love of exquisite china! A handful of prints, perhaps a few of those graceful *fêtes galantes* by Watteau,[4] to add a bit of cheer to these black and barren walls — that is hardly asking too much. A harpsichord! How often have the two of us wished for an instrument to make less wearisome the sluggish and voiceless hours of our captivity, to find in practice and the delights of music some fleeting escape from our miseries! Yes, without question, a harpsichord we must have! Music works such wonders! Does it not come back to you how the most unpretentious tune renews one's heart with such freshness? Yes, yes, we must have a harpsichord! Must we not, Patrick?"

Patrick made a pretence of being convinced by such irrefutable reasoning. Such notions of Fitz-Harris's were perhaps absurd, but in his predicament, in his frame of mind, it was just this — this and nothing else — that Fitz-Harris

truly needed. Patrick, having understood this at once, would have thought it heartless to trouble him more with his matter-of-fact reservations. What is reasonable, for all its reasonableness, can still at times prove extremely vexatious and wholly inadvisable. Let a man who is oppressed with boredom and wants a cloak to hide his threadbare doublet come by some funds: reason will tell him to buy a cloak, folly will drag him off to the drinking houses. In such a cloak he would enfold both himself and his tedium; the cloak would prove his cerecloth. Yet in the drinking houses, holes gaping at his elbows and collar frayed to rags, keeping company with light-hearted rakes, he will shake off his affliction; courage will return to his breast, and shortly, once more in the saddle, he will rush back into life at full gallop. — Reasonableness is oftentimes lethal. Folly sometimes proves rational; reason sometimes proves foolish. Certain circumstances arise in which reason truly looks so idiotic, in which logic adopts such a nonsensical guise, that one would have to be extraordinarily serious-minded not to explode with laughter at the sight of them.

If Patrick had been taken aback when Fitz-Harris informed him of the purposes to which he meant to put his money, M. de Guyonnet was yet more thoroughly taken aback. He in his turn, exercising all the care befitting an encounter with an invalid, sought to submit to him certain

reasonably sound considerations; but never could he bring him to comprehend that he faced more tangible and more exigent needs, and that neither a harpsichord nor pots from Japan ranked among life's essential provisions.

Thanks to the benevolence of M. de Guyonnet and his unflagging willingness to serve, Fitz-Harris quickly came into possession of all he had so fervently coveted; I leave it to your imagination what contentment and ecstasy must have been his, and what pleasure he must have felt seeing the door of his dungeon swing wide to let in, successively, every single one of his wishes brought to life.

Those first acquisitions had not swallowed up all his capital; but new procurements which he effected with equal alacrity — to wit: a backgammon set, a chessboard, a bilboquet,[5] two domino sets with ivory tiles almost as large as octavo volumes, one intended as a gift for M. de Guyonnet; certain books Patrick had insisted on, a quantity of playing cards, Spanish wine, several bottles of liqueur, and a few pounds of sugar and tea — soon sufficed to render his purse bone-dry. Had the warrant for his liberation arrived a mere month after his uncle's bountiful dispatch, and had it been requisite only that he furnish a single crown to see the drawbridge lowered, he would have been left standing there in shame. But the order failed to come.

Come it never would.

In the company of all these new diversions, dwelling in the species of ease and the delights he had lately introduced into his captivity, Fitz-Harris — unmindful, light-spirited, changeable as he was — existed for some months in what passed for happiness. Yet this ball, this masquerade with which he had, in effect, regaled his unhappiness, brought, as all festivals do, a gloomy and cheerless day after. The roses and daisies wilted in their Japanese vessel, Watteau's courtly entertainments grew smoke-stained as the walls themselves; the harpsichord went husky. His afflictions, which had been but temporarily held in abeyance rather than stanched at their wellspring, rushed back more implacable and more penetrating than ever. Liberty is a need that knows no relenting.

The estimation M. de Guyonnet had formed of the two young gentlemen under his special care had suffered no decline; the compassion he felt for their lot had not faded. The guileless sadness of Fitz-Harris, the forbearance of Patrick — these things worked upon his feelings; for pity was an inhabitant of this man's heart. Every single day, for some time past, as though he had assigned himself this duty as a kind of religious observance, he would come and remain with them awhile. Such occasions were spent in games or in enjoyable exchanges. He delighted in instructing Fitz-Harris in backgammon and Patrick in chess. From time to time he

furnished them with news of the city and accounts of Court scandals. Usually the talk was of Scotland, of England, and of wretched Ireland. The history of his youth, the incidents he had observed firsthand, and the memories he had gathered reasonably well throughout a protracted life amid those intriguing epochs, likewise provided a most fruitful vein. But pre-eminently — and here he experienced a dismal kind of pleasure — Fitz-Harris loved to have him describe the lives and imprisonments of those hapless creatures who over five successive centuries had arrived one after another to waste away or perish in the gaps of these mighty walls, in the pigeon-holes of this death-house. Enguerrand de Marigny[6] was the opening entry in this appalling register of obscure or public tragedies, whose closing entry was destined to be Mirabeau.

Enguerrand de Marigny! — Mirabeau! A king it was who hammered out the first link in this chain, and the last link of it proved the noose that strangled the crown.

The walls of the octagonal stone cell where our two companions dwelt bore the name of Count von Thunn traced out repeatedly, as the reader is aware. This Count von Thunn was a lord of ancient extraction from the Empire's nobility, and was unceremoniously thrown into the Keep merely on account of his friendship with someone who had made an enemy of the Lieutenant-General of Police. His wife, the

Countess, was likewise hauled off to the Bastille for importuning with too much insistence for his liberty; and their son, then in the King's service with the Italian forces, was for having clamoured for his family's release also clapped into Vincennes — yet he was afforded no opportunity to see his father: they kept from him the fact that he was close at hand. At the end of eleven years' confinement, Count von Thunn died, knowing no more than his son had known that they shared the same dungeon; and the young man was refused even the dismal comfort of embracing his father as life left him. On a particular day M. de Guyonnet, at Patrick's solicitation I think, took occasion to speak of this touching tragedy. He had scarcely brought his recital to a close when Fitz-Harris, who had been visibly shaken, most particularly by the latter events, leapt to his feet and cried out with indignation:

"You realise, M. de Guyonnet, that such a thing is utterly detestable? Evil with a purpose, even a wicked purpose, is comprehensible; evil that yields profit is comprehensible; that a man should cut another's throat while robbing him is comprehensible; that the Caribbean cannibal should roast his prisoner and eat him, that a warrior should flay his enemy and turn the skin into a saddle — these things are comprehensible: there is sense in that, there is method; but what nauseates is evil done simply for the pleasure of it,

purposeless evil, evil that nothing calls for — all those trivial cruelties inflicted hour after hour, those polished little savageries, those charming little horrors that pass for routine in the state prisons! When society has disabled the injurious being from inflicting further injury, society's business with him should terminate; and should it at times possess the right, as it assumes it does, to end life, then let its headsman wield a stout blade that severs quickly and surely, not some miserable pin! Prison is a grave, a refuge of death, a hallowed refuge whose walls ought not to hearken to rage, whose keepers ought not to become the instruments of spite. Father and son imprisoned in one fortress, their dungeons side by side; to withhold from the father that those groans penetrating the wall are the groans of his son, to withhold from the son that those chains passing to and fro above his head are being trailed by his father; when fate has made their misery common, to keep them in that misery each ignorant of the other, cruelly and deliberately! Under the crushing weight of eleven years of hopelessness, the aged man sinks into death... not to bring them together in one cell, that the father could at the very least breathe his last in his son's arms, that the son might collect at least his father's last whisper of life; abomination! Who required this, I ask you? The King? The Law? The Law would never sanction such low-born knavery. Great God! What harm could possibly have come from permitting the father to grasp his son's hand, the son to kiss

his father's white locks? Whom did this drawn-out and heartless barbarity serve? Who had issued the orders for it? By means of this unnameable act, this loathsome act — what profit came to the kingdom in knowledge, in peace, in majesty, in riches? In what did the righteousness of this unyielding atrocity consist? Oh, what a hideous affair! Miserable Count von Thunn!

"Saints preserve us! It occurs to me suddenly, if such is the way of things, who can assure me my old mother is not on the other side of this wall, is not languishing under this very ceiling; my poor old mother, who calls to me, who prays and weeps, who may be dying this very moment! Have pity! Pity, I beg! Better death than this! Smash through my ribs, split my heart open; there is a sob caught inside that chokes the life from me! What am I babbling? Forgive me, ah, forgive me — my mind runs wild; pardon me, M. de Guyonnet; you are kind, you are a man of feeling; no, it cannot be, my mother is not here, tell me she is not? My old mother is not confined here — you would not have concealed it from me. The Lieutenant-General of Police in all his majesty, and the King, have not cast her into this pit for having besought compassion from their granite hearts; the King has not devised the particulars of my martyrdom and pronounced: Mother and son shall be kept apart, son shall not behold mother.

"All things considered, is it not peculiar, if not loathsome, that some men, at their mere caprice, can deal thus with their fellow men, and what a splendidly ordered society ours must be where such enormities are committed under royal sanction and in the very bedchamber of the Law? Be candid with me, M. de Guyonnet — what think you of this kingdom? In this kingdom the Law is not forged of iron; it is a lump of wax that extends and shrinks, rolls, unrolls, flexes and folds, assuming at every turn innumerable new configurations as the King or the King's accomplices work it with their thumbs. The Law here is a kept woman who governs rain and shine alike. The Law... but listen to me prattle! There is no such thing as Law any more: Law has been defaced these many years. Originally it was virginal, it was just, as all things are that spring from God or the people; but the monarchy ambushed its virtue; the monarchy debased it; the monarchy made it its dwelling; and from that incestuous commerce sprang a race of base-born sons, a nest of bastards who took their mother's place after choking the life from her. There we have it! This is the loathsome spawn that rules over us? These are the masters in whose name we are hewn and shaved! Justice, once a watchful husbandman making the Law yield fruit for the people, now grown deaf, benumbed, half-asleep, gorges herself from the King's plate on the very purest blood of his subjects, offering them in place of wholesome wheaten bread nothing but a loaf of

poppies and darnel, a bitter bread productive of dizziness. — You are amazed, M. de Guyonnet; such vehement utterances seem out of character coming from me; you are right to think so. There was a time when I could not frame a single thought that was not superficial, yet imprisonment has weighted my mind with ballast; suffering has eaten away my youth and left my heart creased with age. All that has taken place with regard to me and in my surroundings has furnished me with matter for thought. Once I was happy, once I was good-natured: anguish has turned me bitter; I sense here that I am being transformed; I sense here that malice is taking root in me.

"And so Count von Thunn, for no greater crime than his friendship with a man of virtue, M. de Brurauté, who happened not to be friendly with a certain M. d'Argenson — a flunkey into whose pockets the King crammed blank authorisations by the dozen — is hauled off to the Keep; and so his wife, ripped from her daughter's arms, is flung into the Bastille; and so his son is shackled with chains; and after eleven years locked in a dungeon contiguous to his son's own dungeon, thus does aged Count von Thunn perish in solitude, forsaken like some mad dog. There! That is the whole of it! One drives a family into devastation; one kills off the head, one dismembers each individual... And is that all there is to it? Men hold onto the memory or allow it to slip away; history passes over it in silence or commits it to the page; well! That

is the sum of it? It becomes one deed among the multitude of bygone deeds... And that is it? Has all been said? — No, I say no, that is not the whole! No, emphatically no, not everything has been said! Impossible! It would be too wicked, too horrific. Have patience! The worker shall be paid what he is owed. Injury shall beget reprisal! Take my word for it, this drama that plays itself out will come to a climax! May God grant it be not a fearful one!

"Alas! While I expend my pity on the shades below, ill-fated Count von Thunn, while I bewail your fortune, I lose sight of my own, which is every bit as ghastly. When you think of it: why do I find myself here? Of what am I guilty? Officers of the police, professional makers of guilty men, claimed I had spoken heaven-knows-what about some insignificant trollop who had made herself the King's whore, and for whose sake the King was turning France into a brothel. What great harm, forsooth! Granting that I did say what they report I said. — Without question, to make a display of servility, to act the amiable pet, to win himself a protective pat with the fan upon his shoulder, or to obtain preferment for some country kinsman of his, the Lieutenant-General of Police prescribed my crime and my capture. That anyone should be able to arrange a man's fate in this way, that Court lickspittles, that police underlings should be permitted to play heads-or-tails with the fortunes of the subjects of this

realm — it is a monstrosity! It is an abomination! And this is borne in silence? And that beast of burden called the people will not lash out? No, certainly not — the brute is perfectly safe. Snugly ensconced in the barn the monarchy has built for him, let him have clean straw and provender at the feeding-rack, and the rest is of no concern to him! He readily offers his back to infamy. The yoke of bondage becomes him better than the yoke of honour.

"Suppose for a moment, if it be necessary, that I did once indulge in some impertinence regarding the King's lady-love — yet this woman is dead and forgotten; her ashes have lain cold these many years past. Whence comes it that her wrath remains erect? What keeps the brand of her hatred alight? Who, pray, has appointed himself successor to her vengefulness? You who avenge beyond the grave the absent honour of a strumpet — would-be Quixotes, flunkeys, officious fools, unimpeachable magistrates who stand guard over harlotry — until when will you hold me in chains? Pharaoh has surely moved on to novel attachments; what is the new sultana about? Whilst savouring the present moment, whilst assuring herself of time to come, might she not look back with some pity and put an end to the far-too-lengthy sufferings that her predecessor piled high from deep within the royal sleeping-chamber? Might it be that among harlots as among royalty, succeeding dynasties amount to no more than

succeeding dynasties of woe? Again I ask you, tell me! In the name of whom am I still held captive? Who wishes me destroyed? The King or France? France is not privy to the secrets of the Court or of the police; she neither knows nor will likely ever know what has become of me. They keep certain matters from France; they are economical with her shame. The King in his own person reigns hardly at all and governs less yet: he is a china king! He cares not a whit whether his subjects are turned to chaff or fodder. What is more, should he be evil-minded, which I am incapable of believing, had he ordered his hirelings to harm me, one could quite easily disregard his orders in this particular, as in so many other respects, without troubling one's conscience overmuch. How simple it would be to outwit Saturn's ravenous appetite![7]

"For a horse, one goes to the horse-coper; for wine, one goes to the public house; but at which threshold does one present oneself to be granted one's rights? The land teems with judges, yet justice is in short supply; it is not given out, not sold, not even handed over as a gift. Come! You of the Parlement[8] who have the whip hand — for the love of God, exert yourselves somewhat for the guiltless! Black gowns aplenty wear themselves out chasing after the guilty. Leave off juggling with Jansenius;[9] everyone knows you are master hair-splitters. Up with you, gentlemen, and away! The

downtrodden may be defended, the guiltless saved, without your standing in orderly ranks like chapel chairs under the sonorous wainscoting of a palatial hall. Ahoy! Sirs, ahoy! The tails of your wigs will keep for another day; leave your ladyloves where they are; strap on your spurs, belt on your swords; horse and away, horse and away! Rush to where men weep, rush to where everlasting moans are heard! Enter the prisons, go down into the cells; order the pits filled up; restore to the living world, to their families, those gentlemen of honour kept interred there, those men of heart being worn to nothing there! And if Pharaoh should by any chance demand to know why you took it upon yourselves to behave so, you will say to him — you who are such masters of official protest — 'Sire, ours has been a godly labour. Sire, we are the keepers of your subjects' liberties, not the clerks of your pleasure. Sire, we are the sceptre belonging to the people, not the King's partisan. Sire, each to his own business: our ministry is not yours; we, Sire, exist to root out evil — too bad for you if it suits you not!'

"But no, brothers in wretchedness, you who like myself have been doomed to everlasting pain — rest easy, rot undisturbed in your pits! Have no fear, the Parlement's worthies will not trouble themselves about you; they recline on beds of roses!

"You noble philosophers, speak as much as you wish, yet those days you malign were worthier than these. Yonder, on the far side of this dungeon, within sight of this château, come and you shall yet behold the worm-riddled trunk of that oak where a king-knight was wont to sit dispensing justice to whosoever came.[10] In that time, justice flowed from the King himself. Oh, if for just one day that gallant soul could shed his grave-clothes and seat himself again beneath that tree, how many ills would be put to rights! How his noble rage would ignite when one approached to tell him: 'Sire, there in that dungeon above, a young man lies fettered — I misspeak — two honourable young men, and all on account of a woman demented by bodily passion who dwelt with the King your son.' 'The King my son!' would be his cry. 'No, never — that man is no son of mine; that man comes not from my stem; that man is no member of my house! That is no blood of mine, no race of mine! A bastard, nothing more!'

"I scream, I weep, I drain my strength, I rage; but what good does it do? My state continues unchanged, fixed. Turn where I will, there it stands eternally staring back at me. I see it clearly — it stands written in fate's book, I am destined to die here! Villainy! My God! Yet again I wonder — what am I, that the world's balance depends upon my being locked in this cell? Of what consequence is it where this miserable speck happens to be! Go ahead, M. de Guyonnet, you may let me

out without fear; the sun shall not darken; the dead will not rise from their tombs."

Fitz-Harris here grew quiet: not because his wrath was finished, but because his vigour was; he could speak no more. Striding vigorously up and down his prison, he had unleashed this lengthy harangue with such unfeigned rage, his lips had so drenched every syllable in gall, that, in the manner of an arquebus that jerks backward upon hitting its mark, he had wounded himself in the discharge. The stone, shooting out, had split the sling. To mask the tears streaming from his eyes he embraced his friend about the neck, that friend whom this eruption had dolefully transported back to the field of his own misery and overwhelmed with emotion hardly less extreme. M. de Guyonnet, who had attended to the whole performance with saintly patience, who had indeed occasionally found himself unable to suppress a smile at the most apt and biting turns of phrase, though a little unsettled, making an effort to regard the business in a light manner, set about offering Fitz-Harris moral instruction with all his characteristic goodness and gentle charm.

"Little did I suspect such badness in you, my dear fellow," he told him. "But you are, in perfect sincerity, a most alarming misanthrope; you are thoroughly incensed with all creation. Your distress is profound, I confess; yet it shall come to a close, and greater evils may be found. Don't let your mind run

wild — accept your lot with more composure; you are not, believe me, my dear fellow, either the eldest or the chief among the miserable. By swordplaying so against the windmill that is the monarchy, beware — to use your own splendid words — that you do not come to resemble Don Quixote yourself. The royal robe, blue as heaven and embellished with gilding as the firmament is with stars, may perhaps have hidden in some folds a few holes and a few marks, yet it remains none the less an ample and dependable shelter for the people."

The King's Lieutenant deemed it incumbent upon himself to add a great many other remarks of like character, which I should be most gratified not to record, which Fitz-Harris paid little mind to, and to which, preoccupied as he was with his own reflections, he gave scant heed himself.

Ever since that vexatious outburst, M. de Guyonnet had been most studiously cautious not to let fall, in the course of their talk, any word that might stir his young prisoners to dwell upon their calamity, or bring afresh before their minds the sombre spectre of what lay in store for them. And upon any occasion when Fitz-Harris made to question him about this or that ancient inhabitant of the Keep, or some clandestine incarceration: "We had best not speak of those wretched souls," he would tell him. "Talk, by all means, of the castle of Beauty and its wild carousals, of Isabeau and the

brazen Bois-Bourdon[11] — only have the goodness to let the Keep be. I receive my salary for precisely that, as you well understand. There was a day when you taught me, all too bitterly, the truth of that common saying: One does not speak of the noose beneath the gallows-tree."

Fitz-Harris's uncle, that good Abbé of Saint-Spire de Corbeil, had worked without intermission towards securing his freedom ever since pledging himself to that cause, displaying a fervour and constancy worthy of the apostles themselves. Kneeling, his hairless brow pressed humbly to the sill, he had made petition at every door behind which influence was to be found — he had even presumed to knock at the gates of Versailles. They did but bandy him about: now to Caiaphas, now to Pilate, back again to Caiaphas, then off to Herod. At one door he received a harsh rebuff; at another, nothing but vague and slippery replies. In certain offices they affected a concern they did not feel, and spoke much to no purpose. Elsewhere they would not hear him at all, and made no apology for it. The eagerness with which, in every office, they set about enlarging upon Fitz-Harris's guilt, dwelling upon his supposed corruption, and insisting upon his irredeemable villainy, had by degrees so wrought upon our pious Abbé that he no longer knew what to believe, had come to mistrust his own judgement of his nephew, and was not far from thinking him a menace to society who must be held in

close confinement for the good order and tranquillity of the kingdom. He had, in writing to the young man, contrived rather adroitly to hide how little his petitions had achieved, and had made it his consistent purpose to maintain in the prisoner's mind the soothing belief that freedom was at hand. Nevertheless, after waiting long and seeing no result, he had fancied he could make out, behind language that was clouded and ill at ease, a bitter truth which well-meaning tenderness would not openly declare. And this time, as before, his hopes were bitterly dashed, for he had set great store by his uncle's loyal efforts and by the considerable influence he was known to possess. With that expectation fled, he found himself bereft of every other. It was as though his perdition had been freshly vowed. Nothing was left to him but to wait upon chance, to let the years go by, or to hope that his oppressors might one day tire of tormenting him. His temper grew increasingly volatile, and he was plunged anew into the prostration from which he had briefly risen.

To find himself beyond those walls — this alone occupied Fitz-Harris's mind wholly, and gnawed at his very substance. Together with his ravenous craving for freedom, Patrick nursed other ravening creatures that pecked remorselessly at his vitals. On more than one occasion, though with great gaps of time between, he had addressed letters to M. Goudouly at the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, hoping

either to receive tidings of Deborah or to prompt some investigation into where she might be found and what had become of her, but never once had he received a reply. This obstinate want of reply had brought a deathly chill to his very soul. Seeing that he had counted upon this man, and this man only, as the means by which he might learn where his unfortunate beloved had taken refuge, the case was hopeless now — he knew it in his bones — she was lost to him past all recovery. There was an end of it: the one remaining spark that had flickered ahead of him in the black wilderness of his despair had now, without a sound, been snuffed out.

At the very instant when our young friends, upon whatever road each one of them was treading, found themselves robbed of all hope — just as they were sinking further still into the pitiless wastes of sorrow, and never stood in greater want of comfort, of something to occupy their minds, and of kindly treatment — the lieutenancy of the Keep fell out of the honest keeping of M. de Guyonnet into the clutches of a blustering swashbuckler, a blockhead, a fop, a noisome thing, a cheeseparing wretch, a cur: the Chevalier de Rougemont. This sorry excuse for a chevalier, whether by accident or design, was a minion of the diminutive Duc Phélypeaux de Saint-Florentin de la Vrillière. He had wed, if I am not mistaken, the daughter of him who governed the pages in the household of the Duc d'Orléans. One can readily

understand, therefore, why he was on such a footing — on a "my dear fellow" footing, if you like — with the Lieutenant-General of Police. These few dabs of the brush, or blows of the bludgeon, as one may choose to see them, must suffice for now: we shall come to know this gentleman all too well as we proceed.

The prisoners had none of them had the privilege of glimpsing so much as the tip of the new star's nose — this star that had lately dawned upon the Keep — yet each and every one of them had already experienced the ill effects of his malign ascendancy. Men's blood had thickened in their veins; their hearts had turned to ice. Every parvenu who gains command thinks it incumbent upon him to signal his advancement by means of new levies and novel alterations. Such is the way of things, whether the scale be petty or grand. One will sell off the nation's forests, another shall snatch a piece of firewood from those he keeps confined; this one will redraft the charter granted to his subjects and do away with the established faith, that one shall redraw his prisoners' bill of fare and strike out the pair of apples allowed on Thursdays and the twopenny Sunday biscuit. One will set the nation ablaze with civil war, another will put out a single candle. In brief, upon the chests of those subject to it, the new regime settled with the weight of a grim incubus. All things were reduced and hemmed in. The number of guard-houses was

increased, sentries were posted in twice the number, and every conceivable safeguard was piled upon the last. Those who dwelt in the Château found themselves hampered or affronted; those in the Keep were crushed and made to suffer. There was a great show of consequence made; they insisted they could not be held answerable for the prisoners except under particular conditions — not without a specified quantity of bolts, of barricades, of constables. The system of provisioning was stripped bare. Nothing was served any longer but inferior meat, hard as leather, full of sinews, and slippery with fat — hock, neck-piece, chuck — and since no knife or iron fork was allowed to the confined, they were forced to scratch and tear at it with their nails and worry it like dogs with their teeth; it is not difficult to conceive what a hard and disagreeable task that made of every meal. Wine grew bitter, bread was stale and crude, fish gave off an offensive smell; one would have thought the vegetables had made their way across a river on their own, and that the dishes had been thrown together with cuts of a cutlass. Not a privilege remained, not a trace of clemency! Access to the platform of the lookout-post was denied to Fitz-Harris henceforward. No one was allowed into the garden any longer; every soul was left to languish in never-ending obscurity.

These reforms had long since been put into practice, and Fitz-Harris — ill-adapted to a penitential existence, and rendered more furious than feeble by all these deprivations and austerities — was most eager to catch a glimpse of the new tyrant whose unseen hand had borne down so crushingly upon their crowns of thorns. Finally, one fair morning, the door, having made its usual racket, swung open, a voice shouted from without, "M. le Lieutenant, in the King's name!" And in marched a person, stiff as a poker, trailed by a gaoler and two mechanics in leather aprons, trowels hanging at their waists and picks slung over their shoulders. Inflexible, prim, and high and mighty, he had much the appearance of a walking-stick, or of a constable's black baton with a sword dangling crosswise from it. For all salutation, he gave an awkward bob of the head and blinked, and as our two captives got to their feet politely, out of deference:

"There, there, gentlemen," he said with a sneer, "pray don't disturb yourselves, stay where you are. I believe you're Irishmen, and musketeers besides?"

"Yes, sir," Patrick replied, maintaining his composure. "Irishmen we are; musketeers we have been."

"Criminals guilty of *lèse-majesté*,[12] I believe?"

"Prisoners, sir, yes! Criminals we are not!" Patrick rejoined.

"Whyte — that would be which of you?"

"Myself, sir."

"The other fellow, then..."

"The other fellow, Monsieur le Commandant, is named Fitz-Harris; and what might you be wanting?"

"Nothing in particular," said the new Lieutenant with even greater imbecility, while he inspected with an air half disapproving, half indifferent, each and every stick of furniture in the room. After he had given everything a good looking-over: "M. de Guyonnet must have been out of his mind! His Majesty, my word, was wonderfully well served," he remarked with a pitying wave of the hand.

"Sir, no!" Fitz-Harris exclaimed at these words, breaking in upon him. "M. de Guyonnet was nothing of the sort! Show a little more respect, sir, if you will, when you speak of an upright man who goes from us accompanied by our tears and our lamentations, who won our hearts as certainly as you are forfeiting them, whose memory we honour as yours shall one day be reviled."

"M. de Guyonnet was clearly deranged, I tell you," the Chevalier de Rougemont went on pompously, "to have permitted a cell to be furnished in such a manner! Decorative vessels, prints, a spinet... It's the dressing-room of some theatre wench, not a lock-up! We'll soon set that straight."

"Oh, you're equal to that task, I'm sure, Monsieur le Lieutenant," Fitz-Harris rejoined with a cutting smile that resembled nothing so much as a razor's edge.

The workmen attending the new potentate of Vincennes were, their implements made it abundantly clear, bricklayers. For this fellow — well, there's no accounting for taste — was infatuated with bricklaying: he wore his heart on his sleeve where workers in stone were concerned. He was never without them — round him, behind him, in his dwelling, all but hanging on him; these were his household troops. What fault can be found with that? — From the moment he took up his post, the Keep had swarmed with them: they were at every door, every fireplace, every drainpipe, every casement; the roofs were thick with them; they choked the moats. There was a regular bombardment of plaster, a full-scale offensive of mortar. It seemed as though every navvy on the face of the earth had assumed royal dignity along with him. While M. de Rougemont could not claim, like Louis XII, to be father to his people, he was — let us give him his due — undeniably the patron and father of all the Limousin[13] masons. But since he could not erect keep upon keep, turret upon turret, or heap Pelion on top of Ossa,[14] he set all this festering mass of men to work on tinkering jobs, generally useless and almost always laughable.

When those rather harsh words we have just related had been exchanged, M. le Lieutenant for the King abandoned his prisoners to themselves. After which, using his sword to gauge the size of the window-opening, he swung round to address his two pet artisans:

"Come, fellows, let's be about our task," he called out. "As we have already accomplished in the other lock-ups, you will raise this window to such a height that it's impossible to see either over it or directly out of it. On the exterior you'll cement a grille jutting outward, matching those already in place, and you'll furnish the ironworker with its dimensions. You will fix anew into the reveals those crossing bars, and within the embrasure that row of bars which you'll have trimmed to fit. Here, inside, to hold the window well out of reach, you'll set up this grating bent inward and bent back again, which you'll have adjusted at the smithy as required, and which I shall afterwards have my metal-worker line with wire netting of a fine and close weave."

Having delivered these directives with all his usual self-importance, and making a point of throwing in a few technical expressions after the fashion of some middling tradesman who has built himself a house, M. de Rougemont was about to depart when Fitz-Harris stepped toward him and, transfixing him with a look that seemed to drill through his ribs, exclaimed:

"You do well, Monsieur le Lieutenant, to have these casements sealed; you know yourself for what you are: it would never do for heaven to observe the abominable practices you carry on here! Really, my good man, you're going to altogether too much trouble to deny us light and air; just have us stifled between a couple of mattresses — it would be more economical and dispatch us quicker."

"You are wanting in respect, young fellow; perhaps it has slipped your mind that I represent the person of the King," answered M. de Rougemont, swelling with pride.

"The King! There's my bugbear; don't bring him up with me!" Fitz-Harris broke in brusquely, eyeing him from crown to heel. "Be that as it may, sir, if you truly represent the King, it has to be said that His Majesty is being represented in a most ludicrous fashion. No, no. You don't represent anyone, you're not standing in for anybody, you are your own king: Harpagon the First."[15]

"Insolent cur!... Oh, you'll pay dearly for that."

"I had imagined, sir, that I'd paid in full already."

On the following morning, at roughly the same hour, as the masons were at work on the window-opening, the three doors were flung open one by one, and M. de Rougemont presented himself with the same starched demeanour he had shown the previous day, attended on this occasion by a keeper

of the keys and a pair of lackeys dressed in his household colours. The whole party advanced with soldierly tread. They looked for all the world like the Argonauts departing to win the fleece. Reaching the middle of the room, they all came to a sudden stop with military precision, and the King's Lieutenant, addressing them with all the solemnity of some Homeric hero, discharged this harangue full in the enemy's face:

"If I am to discharge my office properly and serve the King as I ought, I cannot tolerate for a single instant the grotesque irregularities which M. de Guyonnet permitted to take root in this government. I remarked yesterday, gentlemen, that this prison of yours is more like some stage-performer's boudoir than a dungeon. Yet the King cannot possibly have meant to set you up as ladies of pleasure; suffering is what you are here for. It is necessary that the prisoner should, with each heartbeat, be made aware of the full oppression of his chains, and be kept cheek by jowl with his wretchedness. Therefore, by the King's authority, we shall commence the confiscation of all these items which protest at their presence here."

"Not so fast, Monsieur le Lieutenant!" Fitz-Harris burst out furiously. "These things are mine and mine to dispose of, and by right and reason no hand shall be laid upon them until I have disposed of them myself! Wait, I say!"

Saying which, he grabbed the pick from one of the stone-cutters, swung it with all his might, and reduced the harpsichord to splinters, though the two lackeys had already started dragging it towards the entrance. Next, swift as a shaft from the bow, he circled the dungeon striking with his pick, reducing every framed picture on the walls to flying shards. Making another charge, he broke the trictrac board and the chess set to pieces, cast away his implement, and smashed to powder upon the paving-stones the two vases from Japan which M. de Rougemont had prudently clutched under his arm. That business finished, he drew himself up defiantly and brought his foot down hard on the wreckage strewn across the ground:

"There!" he called out. "I leave it to you; it's all yours, sirs — help yourselves!"

So rapidly had the tempestuous Fitz-Harris accomplished this pillage that no man among them had time enough to recover his wits and put up resistance. In the middle of this crash and clatter, M. le Lieutenant for the King, in the most ridiculous state of stupefaction, simply stood there like some astonished barnyard fowl. In the end, incapable of hiding his simple-minded dismay, there escaped his lips: "What a shame!" — uttered with a note of profound sadness.

Fitz-Harris caught that remark in mid-flight.

"Yes indeed, Monsieur le Lieutenant, what a shame that the egg your cupidity was sitting on so devotedly should have been cracked! Yes, a great shame… You had your plans all made, didn't you? You'd mapped it all out: 'The harpsichord will stand in my drawing-room between my windows, the vases from Japan upon my chimney-shelf — what a handsome effect that will produce!' What a loss, certainly! The bearskin[16] was a splendid one. Well then, sir, make the best of it — pay up merrily for the value of that bearskin. I detest beforehand those inheritors who will squabble over my leavings when I'm dead, and I'm not about to give them a foretaste while I live. When a man has drunk his fill, he does better to smash his glass than to see it raised to the lips of a wretch or a cad."

Whilst Fitz-Harris continued to flay him thus without pity, M. le Lieutenant for the King — who did not appear to take much notice of these cutting insults, but gulped them down like a man who had made it his business to gulp down insults — had stepped over to the key-bearer, murmured a few words to him, and then withdrawn. In a little while, with four sergeants-at-arms in his train, he came back into the room. M. de Rougemont promptly bade these valorous guardsmen to form a ring about Fitz-Harris and Patrick, and to maintain an unblinking vigil over them pending further instruction. Once his captives were thus kept at bay, he

ordered the confiscation of whatever Fitz-Harris's pick had smashed or left standing; or rather, he had every blessed thing carried off: games, playing-cards, pens, paper, ink, books — not an item was left. Patrick besought him pressingly, though with proper dignity, to allow him to keep his Bible if nothing else. Not bothering to answer this supplication, he opened the sacred volume with an air of expertise; but it being an English edition, he came a cropper — he was unable to puzzle out so much as a word. In defence of his ignorant honour, he tossed it aside with scorn, declaring with an air of still greater expertise: "Bible of the Huguenots, grimoire of heretics, fit only for the bonfire; away with it!"

Once the dungeon had been returned to its pristine nakedness — meaning, when nothing remained but a pair of wooden chairs, a miserable bed, a table, and a broken-lipped jug — they began rummaging through the chests, taking out all the linens and clothes which M. le Lieutenant for the King did not deem, in the case of criminals, to be of absolute necessity. Coming to the valise that M. Goudouly, Patrick's one-time landlord, had once sent on from the Hôtel Saint-Papoul, and which contained some costly and mournful relics belonging to Deborah, M. de Rougemont's surprise was considerable upon finding it stuffed with ladies' clothing and jewellery. He was almost unable to master his wonder and the

satisfaction he felt within. Had he had the boldness, I fancy he would have kissed his prize out of sheer pleasure.

"There's no doubt about it," he declared at length, snapping the valise shut following a rather extended period of rapture and thrusting the key deep into his pocket. "In M. de Guyonnet's day this place was a land of milk and honey. Days here were devoted to enjoyment, nights to riot and excess. They danced, they staged balls in disguise. Heaven help us! And these, I suppose, were your fancy-dress outfits, eh, gentlemen? A travesty! The King shall hear of this from me. Well then, gaoler, cart off these rags."

When he heard "rags," Patrick jerked violently and could not prevent a growl of rage from escaping him. He would gladly have given his right hand to hold onto these sacred remnants of his beloved; he would have offered his very life to wrest these relics from the contaminating hands of this flunkey; but the manner in which his first request had been received made it incumbent upon him to maintain that noble silence befitting his self-respect. He did no more than wipe a tear from his eye, and turned his face away to spare himself the sight.

The raid was over; M. de Rougemont sent away the guard; but as he was making to leave, catching sight by accident of Fitz-Harris's dog — poor Cork, who had cowered beneath the table — he stepped back, and holding his sword

beneath its muzzle with a conquering look: "Silence, cur," he told it. Then he said further: "I ought, by rights, gentlemen, to order this animal removed; but I choose to be remiss in this aspect of my office; you may keep it. As you seem fond of it and look after it, you will have to share your allowance with it, and it will be a sparse one; so much the less for you to consume; so much the greater your hunger — by all means keep it!"

At this vile and ultimate insult, Fitz-Harris cried out in disgust, and answered with magnificent indignation: "Barnaville reborn,[17] Monsieur le Lieutenant for the King — you mean to goad us past all bearing. You're trying to make us do what Jean Crônier did — him that was brother to the Holland newspaper-man — rip stones out of the wall, grind them to a point, and crack your head open with them, that you might then haul us before a special court and have us put to death or sent to pull an oar in the royal galleys. But you're barking up the wrong tree — we shan't do any such thing, mark my words! Make no mistake — it isn't the galleys we fear; they represent all we could wish for! There, at any rate, we'd have fresh air, we'd look upon the sea and the heavens!"

True to his ignominious word, with all the fidelity a gentleman might show to an honourable promise, which he was quite incapable of being, M. le Lieutenant for the King carried out his kitchen-boy's prediction to the letter. Our

young friends' ration grew thin, to be sure. To the sweeping enhancements he had brought about, he added, in their case, some individual touches. Orders had been given to the key-bearers that fires should be made for prisoners but twice a day, no matter what the rigours of winter or the severity of cold — to wit, three logs were to be placed upon the grate in the morning upon entering the cells of such as were blessed with a fireplace, and another three logs at dinnertime in the evening; but where they were concerned, the six logs were entirely done away with. Every prisoner was entitled, by long-established usage, to six tallow candles during the summer months, and to eight in winter; but candles — be they summer candles or winter candles — were for them also put upon the forbidden list; which meant that, given the tiny dimensions of their casement — crowded, as we know, with a thicket of iron bars — they endured for much of the year the grim reality of nineteen hours of darkness out of every four-and-twenty. Once, finally, fatigued with languishing in such deadly gloom, fatigued with stumbling about in the dark, and able to stand it no more, Fitz-Harris sent word to the Chevalier de Rougemont, beseeching him to take pity and allow them a candle or two; but the man had it in him to make sport of this wretched appeal. By way of the turnkey, he returned answer that he marvelled at their asking for candles; that in default of wax, gentlemen of their quality should make do with burning moonshine.

M. le Chevalier was all the more willing to continue with this surplus of ill-treatment, as he found it turned to his benefit. His base greed had a hand in it every bit as much as his desire for personal revenge; or better said, these two dames got on together like thieves at a country fair. In this instance, the Chevalier bore some resemblance to those filthy school-keepers who, at the least transgression, counting themselves lucky when domestic finances haven't made inventing one a necessity, are quick to sentence their pupils to forfeiture of pudding or to bread and water; who, on the pretence of furnishing the mind, famish the body; who never mete out punishment save for the cookpot's advantage; and to whom their hungry scholars could rightly say: "If you please, sir, rather less preaching and rather more broth."

As with those sorry individuals, it was not that the King's Lieutenant was in any immediate need of these trifling fiddles. Yet one added to one makes two; yet small rivulets become great rivers; yet he was laying up treasure. His miserliness, what's more, would have had him bowing and scraping to a German shilling, to a rubbed-out farthing. By no means! It wasn't that he stood in pressing want of these things, for his post was a good one — good as could be! Yet are there fixed limits to either good or beauty? May not the beautiful be made lovelier? May not the good be rendered finer? Though better may be the foe of good, best is no enemy to it. The

truth is that this comfortable post of his, comfortable though it was in its way — let us be fair to him — he had possessed the cunning to cultivate so deftly with certain small doses of artificial manure, and to water with a system of irrigation peculiarly his own and so admirably suited to the purpose, that he had — and I say this with perfect honesty and complete candour — very substantially enhanced its yield. It resembled, in consequence, an everlasting spring; both flowers and fruits hung there whatever the time of year. There was a harvest for him there in every month. But under all that greenery, if a spade had been driven in, it would have clinked against bones as in a churchyard. The Lieutenant for the King at the Keep was paid, in the ordinary way for his office, no more than three thousand livres. But all the pickings, all his cleverness, came into play, as has been observed, and changed the picture altogether. He had such a talent for puffing up the dead thing that a frog swelled into an ox. The cardboard mule became a horse cast in bronze. To put it briefly, the underling's trifling thousand écus were turned into twenty or twenty-five thousand handsome livres yearly income, averaging the years together. Five-and-twenty thousand livres a year!... Yet this gold was blood-money, those were the thirty silver coins of Judas.

Twenty-five thousand livres!... Taking everything into account, it was no great sum, scarcely adequate even, for so

splendid a dedication to the King, to Kingship, to the Kingdom; for the worthy soul put himself to no end of bother. What sleepless care! What a head for business! What cunning! What acumen! What a fellow equally at home in the office and the scullery! What devoted attention to the good of the establishment! How thick and fast he laid about him with his crook! How keenly the hounds snapped at his command! What a silence reigned in the Keep! What misery! How excellently everything was barred in! How airtight everything was sealed off! How splendidly they were made to suffer! How bitterly cold it was! How keen the hunger! How despair ruled supreme! Five-and-twenty thousand livres! For all that! It wasn't overmuch, it was barely anything. Lord, what eagerness! What unflappable calm! What a heart proof against all feeling! What adoration of his office! What fire! What magnificent zealotry! So magnificent, indeed, that this zealot of a servant had the sorrow, more than once, of not being sufficiently valued by his employers. The Marquis Paulmy d'Argenson,[18] Governor of the Château, a scion of the first Superintendent of Police in the Realm, M. Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson — the self-same gentleman who abused the King's trust and Pontchartrain's to take revenge on the Marquis de Brurauté by means of the Count von Thunn, as we have already seen — the Marquis de Paulmy d'Argenson, as I say, was obliged on many an

occasion to stamp upon this viper's tail to call him to heel, such lengths did he go to in his royal devotion!

Rage is a mighty current that supports and sweeps away. In his rage against the new arrangement of things, Fitz-Harris found at first some fortitude. But after the tide had risen, after the dying flux pulled away, his boat lost the water that floated it and ran hard aground once more; the ebb left it dry upon the shore. And as on some forsaken stretch of sand, he was left standing once more in the middle of his malaise. What was there to amuse oneself with? Of wood or of stone, what is there to do to pass the time in a coffin? Talk to each other?... It was nearly ten years since these two miserable young men had been imprisoned together, the two of them alone, and they had told one another all: childhood reminiscences, youthful sentiments, wild notions, dreams, secret aspirations, prideful fancies, lapses, amorous trifles, true loves, love of homeland! recollections of home, recollections of their fathers, recollections of brothers and companions, recollections of their mothers, recollections of their sisters. A thousand times they had travelled and re-travelled the paths of the mountain. In their mind's eye, a thousand times they had gone back to frolic on the banks of the lake where they were born, plucking fresh reeds, amassing pebbles, tossing stones at swooping swallows, or rippling the water with a long spray of willow. Read? Fitz-Harris was no great one for

books; his restless mind gave him too little peace. Even as his eyes followed the words mechanically along the page, his mind was constructing elsewhere things of far greater beauty than any man ever set down. Patrick, now — that was another story!... But there were no books left to them. And had they been on terms friendly enough with M. le Lieutenant for the King, as the saying went, to make such a request of him, the outcome would have been about the same. There was nothing like the Bastille's library in the Keep. M. de Rougemont, besides, was not given to literature; he owned a pantry beautiful as the case of a church organ, to be sure, but he had no shelves for books; and a captive had to supplicate a full twenty times before being granted one of the tattered books lying about the establishment. Those prisoners who were well thought of did sometimes contrive to have a quire of paper delivered to them; but each leaf was scrupulously numbered, and they had to give an accounting of its use. If they wrote letters, they were handed unsealed to the Lieutenant, who read them without exception but seldom permitted them to be sent. Such letters as were addressed to them from the outside world never, one might say, arrived.

Amid this purposeless existence, Fitz-Harris — it had grown into his peculiar habit — would remove the woollen blanket from their miserable cot, spread it on the floor, lie upon it with Cork beside him, and there, in a sort of doze or

numbness that might have been opium-induced, he would remain for days on end, long stretching days, motionless and silent, his eyes either closed or staring at the stones of the vaulted ceiling, studying the sections and curious figures that, in his benumbed imagination, seemed to take shape from the joints between the arch-stones and vault-ribs running counter to one another in their masonry. And Patrick, for his part during those hours, sat at the table bent over it, his face pressed into his folded arms and hidden from view, occasionally weeping, and sinking into visions that God no doubt granted him, but which no living soul has known, which no soul ever will know.

M. de Guyonnet's attentions to his two favourite inmates, the salutary regime enjoyed at the Keep during his tenure, had held in check the devastations of boredom in Fitz-Harris. But now, prey to the most all-consuming tedium, he was withering away like a summer flower under autumn's first cold gusts; he was growing pale and spindly like a wretched little wild herb imprisoned indoors; he was growing enfeebled for want of space to move and exertion. Their only constitutional consisted of being led occasionally from their dungeon into the large communal room, which held, in each of its corners, an eight-sided cell like their own. This dim and barren room, arched with pointed vaults, possessed but one pillar in its midst, and round this Fitz-Harris and Patrick circled and

circled again mournfully, as if revolving around a monomania. They resembled nothing so much as a pair of blinkered nags yoked to a mill-wheel. Sundays — I had almost forgotten — they were occasionally allowed an excursion: whenever the chaplain performed mass at the chapel of the Keep, they were escorted thither. And there — from deep within cage-like compartments, all shut fast with double doors, into which prisoners were thrust one at a time like dangerous beasts, appearing like a brace of grey or striped hyenas, whether from Poland or Coromandel[19] — they attended, with heavy and anguished hearts, the commemoration of that final meal the innocent prophet shared among men, that stainless lamb so cravenly nailed to the cross.

Fitz-Harris was withering away like a summer flower beneath the first cold gusts of autumn, as I have said; and because he was aware of his decay, because he could see himself withering and growing prematurely old, this deepened his anguish yet further. The idea of his perdition was ever-present in his mind, whether he viewed the matter wildly or soberly, whether he embraced or resisted this doom. Oftentimes, gazing at his fleshless arms, his thinned limbs, he would break down in floods of tears. The dismal thought that filled his mind pierced into everything, assumed every shape to force its way into the light. One day, to mention but one instance, as he was pouring himself something to drink, he

knocked the broken spout of the jug and all but broke it into pieces. Then happening to pick up one of the broken pieces, quite sharp-edged, an impulse came over him, and he gave in to it.

"Patrick!" he called out. "I have it! I'm going to scratch out my own epitaph!"

And having first traced the outline of an hourglass and a scythe, he inscribed:

HERE LIES KILDARE FITZ-HARRIS,

BORN ON THE NINTH OF APRIL 1744

AT KILLARNEY, IN THE COUNTY OF KERRY, IRELAND,

BURIED ALIVE IN THIS STONE TOMB

ON THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1763,

IN THE NINETEENTH YEAR OF HIS AGE,

FIVE MONTHS AND TWELVE DAYS BEYOND.

THE CORNER OF HIS SHROUD HE RAISED WITH FINGERS THAT SHOOK, AND HERE, INTO THIS INNER WALL, GRAVED THESE WORDS BY HIS OWN DOING, WHILE TO OTHERS LESS CRUELLY SITUATED HE ENTRUSTED THE LABOUR OF THEIR INSCRIPTION UPON THE COVERING STONE.

DE PROFUNDIS.[20]

Patrick looked on in silence, his head resting limply to one side, while a sad, sweet smile played across his features.

"So, my bonny Pat," Fitz-Harris called out to him tenderly, "have you no word for me? Is not this epitaph of mine both novel and out of the common way — altogether worthy, I think, to rival the fame of that mysterious epitaph at Bologna? The scythe and sand-glass I must forgo; I am no great hand at sculpture — I leave them to you. My bones in saltire are likewise no great wonder, and my graven teardrops, in the judgement of those who know, might well pass for pears rather than for tears, I freely allow. It falls to you next. Here, take my graver — go on, make your own inscription."

"My thanks, but no, Fitz-Harris. To jest so with things of weight is sheer folly. And besides, I have not the ability — you manage the chisel as the Greeks did, and I do not flatter you in saying so."

"Why, bless me, Miss Patrick!" rejoined Fitz-Harris with wicked mockery. "If you mean to play the coy maiden, we shall try to make shift without your skill. Only tell your servant what to write — he will do the rest."

So he bent once more to his chisel, and Patrick — half from compliance, half perhaps from dread that some satirical remark about him might be carved in perpetuity — spoke out his epitaph:

HERE LIES PATRICK FITZ-WHYTE;
BORN ON THE FIFTEENTH OF JUNE 1742,
IN A BYRE BY THE LAKE OF KILLARNEY,
COUNTY OF KERRY, IRELAND;
BURIED ALIVE BENEATH THIS SELFSAME STONE
ON THE SECOND DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1763,
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST YEAR OF HIS AGE,
MONTHS AND SEVENTEEN DAYS BEYOND.
FAREWELL, DEBORAH!
WE SHALL BE REUNITED YONDER!…
DE PROF.…

He could not bring the last word to completion — a swimming of the senses had taken hold of him. All trembling and uncertain, he crept towards his bed and reached its edge; beyond that he had no power to go. He had grown so weak by then that the mere exertion of scratching these epitaphs into the wall had left him spent. Of late, even in perfect stillness, with no outward effort to occasion them, he had grown liable to these same attacks of weakness. He spoke too of convulsive twitchings, of his heart beating wildly, of

clammy perspiration. There was often about his mouth a distressing spasm that was pitiful to observe. He could not shake off a deadly shivering that attended him always. Such torments gnawed at his nerves and plagued him without cease, until his inborn irritability and his temper worsened in frightful progression. He took heed of all things, busied himself with all things, he who once had given no thought to anything and cared for nothing whatsoever; and the merest bagatelle, for reasons he could scarcely fathom, would jar his nerves and turn his stomach. He would wake gloomy and out of temper, and everything in his surroundings and on his person struck him as squalid, shoddily done, and graceless, and he took it truly to heart. All the glowing passion that had lived within him had turned to ice. The ability to love — if such a thing may be so named — had fled his soul; he was loosening his hold on all things. A pitiless coldness was overtaking him, directed equally at his own person and at everyone else. The warders he plagued and badgered without respite. Gone were all the endearments for Cork. Cork was forever to blame, Cork annoyed him, Cork was rebuked without end. Gone also were the affectionate remarks to Patrick; he was upbraided and told cutting, hurtful things. Yet if, by happenstance, a flicker of fondness sprang to life again, what lunatic excesses would follow! Cork he fondled without stint, kissed him again and again, and asked to be forgiven for having withheld his love for so long. The gentlest phrases he

would lavish upon Patrick; he flattered and fussed over him, and in his anxious kindness sought to bestow upon him all he had — his nursing care, dying man though he was! — even his own share of nourishment. Patrick had a great deal to bear, truth be told, for such dealings were, as anyone may well imagine, harsh and exhausting. Yet what beauty there was in his behaviour! Renouncing all thought of self, he suffered the unfair reproofs and cutting words to slide past unremarked; he flexed, he crouched, he lent himself like a dull-witted menial; he answered with faithful obedience every outlandish whim and every passing caprice.

By the time of which we now speak, the affliction had so worsened in Fitz-Harris that his limbs quivered and bent under his own weight, leaving him scarcely able to hold himself upright. Around midday Patrick would assist him in getting up, muffle him snugly in whatever coverings they had, and seat him in a chair, out of which he would not move until evening brought the time for bed. Still, it was necessary to move him about from one spot to another a full twenty times. Fitz-Harris begged to be placed by the door; but no sooner was he there than he pined to be near the table; and once beside the table, he longed to be nearer the hearth. At times, when his sadness was of a softer cast, after he had spoken much of Ireland, his beloved homeland, he asked to look upon the sky again; Patrick would then take him gently on his

shoulders and place himself beside the wall, just below the little opening. Straining upwards as well as he might, clutching at the bars within, Fitz-Harris was able to bring his head level with the opening, and there he would abide in sad reverie, for however long Patrick's shoulders could endure the load, peering through the iron tracery and the begrimed glass at some tatters of azure heaven, a pale gold radiance, or one star standing alone. How wrenching and how magnificent a sight! A thing so ghastly as to make even stones weep!... Poor, poor young men!

Long had Fitz-Harris remained in this state of debility and decay when, upon a certain morning, the warder, delivering their allotment at the eleventh hour, announced to them the afternoon visit of His Excellency the Lieutenant-General of the Royal Police, and bade them arrange their chamber more presentably.

For the Lieutenant-General was in the habit of coming to the Fortress once a twelvemonth, supposedly to make what passed for an official inspection. Rarely did he neglect this duty. He took considerable delight in the business. He regarded it much as one might a jaunt into the countryside, a meet for the chase, to which he never failed to ask a few of his cronies. Occasionally he would convey his small household thither in a calash, provided they had behaved themselves properly. The King's Lieutenant was, needless to

say, informed well ahead of the day the Lieutenant-General had settled upon. On his arrival at the governor's lodgings, once the polite "How d'you do?" and pleasantries had been exchanged, this official would betake himself, with the unerring certainty of an ass heading back to its millstone, to his accustomed place at the table he was confident had been laid for him. A magnificent and sumptuous repast would then get under way, in which was displayed everything that riches and the most recherché sophistication had been able to invent and bring together. Monsieur the Lieutenant-General guzzled, imbibed, revelled, waxed rhapsodic, heaped on eulogies, tried this and that, lingered over flavours, went back for more of the same, and licked his whiskers clean.

Hosanna in excelsis![21] What a banquet! What sumptuousness! O most blessed Amphitryon![22]...

And then, when he was properly warmed up, in the hottest flush of his rapture, someone would quickly hint to the magistrate, would pour gently into the tube of his ear, that this was roughly speaking the regular fare of the prisoners, and that the very cook who had provoked his transports was the one from the Keep itself. Whether he heard it or no, whether he listened or no, whether he swallowed the tale or no — have it whichever way suits; it has no bearing on our account; but what is positively certain is that the instant the Lieutenant-General was good and pot-bellied, well stuffed,

well soaked, as the expression goes, he was set loose all glowing with satisfaction among the prison towers, where he tarried barely an hour and saw only a handful of prisoners — the peculiar ones, the most diverting to look upon, as he was wont to say — who, poor miserable creatures, durst not protest their ill-usage for dread of making their lot still worse. What is more, they could barely manage to utter a phrase or two about the deliverance they looked for from his equitable hand. Look for justice from the Lieutenant-General of Police? A jest!

The gaoler's word proved good: the Lieutenant-General did indeed pay his once-a-year call that afternoon. That afternoon, to be sure, a tremendous commotion erupted at the cell doors, which all at once swung wide as though by magic and let in with much din a sizeable train of persons. Leading the way, or to speak more accurately, tottering at the front, was the Lieutenant-General, for sundry causes, and because in addition, upon making his entry, his foot had tripped over the step that must be climbed to reach the room — a step which, for a variety of reasons further still, had gone unnoticed by him at the instant of his glorious arrival. Garbed in black, he was the very picture of what a magistrate of quality should be. As to the man himself, a figure of no consequence. Upon his tall heels pressed four further satellites clad in matching black, chief deputies presumably;

thereafter the Lieutenant representing the King at the Keep, accompanied by his staff, all in new dress.

At this piece of theatre, Fitz-Harris, who had been sitting facing away from the door, muffled in all his wretched clothing and the blanket, wheeled his chair about to meet the cavalcade eye to eye. Thus are the two parties arrayed against each other. Fitz-Harris regards the lot of them with his cantankerous look. If it comes to fisticuffs, take care! There will be a fierce reckoning.

With glittering eye and bloated lip, the Lieutenant-General, having mumbled incoherently for some moments, at length managed to unstick his tongue enough to inquire in a voice thick and sticky: "Have you, prisoners, any complaint to make? Are you well fed?"

Patrick responded: "None too well, sir; no, none too well! But our liberty is a matter of greater moment to us; pray let us concern ourselves with the chief necessity. It is our lot in life that wants changing, not our provisions. Make us free men to begin with. And once we are at liberty, we shall fare as the birds of the sky do — not by your will, but by the will of God."

"None too well," Fitz-Harris snapped with asperity, "yes! Seeing we must speak plainly, we are fed none too well — horribly ill indeed! But sir, does it not shame you to come

swaggering here with a full mouth, into this lair of famine, in the sight of miserable folk who are wasting away from want of nourishment? Yes sir, you know it right enough — we are fed wretchedly! Behold what I have become; mark how the flesh is falling from my arms and from my face. This governor you see is a treacherous menial who, without compunction, helps himself freely from the King's basket that was put under his care. This worthy pockets the difference on everything: on bread, on wine, on salt, on beans, on herrings, on the tainted meat he allows us. We are denied light, denied heat, denied clothes. And by virtue of our famishment, our drought, by virtue of our poverty, and the filthy rags eating at our skin, and the chill that chaps us raw, his honour doubtless fits out his mews, strews coin about the gaming-houses, supports harlots! Monsieur invests in sun-drenched fields, silken dresses and English muslins for his lady! His honour performs the role of worthy paterfamilias! His honour rears his brood in prosperity! Why, you! You, the very master set over this menial — you know of these things, and yet you allow them! You look benignly upon such sordid practices! You abet such abominations! Infamy and dishonour!…"

Even as Fitz-Harris hurled these parting words with all the force of his lungs, the Lieutenant-General of Police, thrown into the deepest consternation, had spoken some words which the prisoner's voice buried completely and which

went unheard; then he had gestured as though to take his leave and have his company follow suit. Whereupon the poor ailing man, his righteous wrath having lent him a brief return of vigour, had started up abruptly and, casting away the coverlet that shrouded him, had flung himself bodily against the door. The door had slammed shut from the blow, and immediately, with hardly a breath between, and more daringly yet, he had pressed on:

"Grant me audience, sir, pray! Why such haste? Is your meal not over and done with? Listen to me — stay away from the wine-cellar; after all, each man should have his turn with you — just now you are under my roof, so to speak, and I am the one pouring your cup. Oh, I can see it plain as day — my speech sits ill with you. You anticipated no such nosegay of thistles as I have culled from these slabs. Long have I carried all this on my soul; death is coming for me... but I shall not depart this world, thank heaven, without having spoken my piece to you. If they press their heel to my windpipe, as upon some creature underfoot, I rise against them; if they goad me with the rowel, I strike back! Thus far I had played the dolt to win some fodder; I had been civil to you on your calls; with both hands joined together, meekly, I had besought my freedom of you, had sought with honeyed words to move your mercy and the fairness in your breast — but where has all that gotten me? How have you improved our state in these

eleven years of honouring our cell with your presence; in these seven years since your crony the governor came to the Keep, in which time you have appeared, half-seas over, to perform the charitable Vincent de Paul,[23] all fatherly compassion and warm feeling? Compassion!... Pretence!... Strip away that false face — it ill becomes you, you sleek wild boar pretending to be a lover of humanity! Lieutenant-General of the Kingdom's Police, heralds are at your command; send them forth, I defy you to do it, to proclaim at every street-corner what you subject us to in this hole, and why you subject us to it. Ah, but you will do no such thing, and wisely so, for your town-criers would be torn to pieces. These are not matters for publication, you see: they are the domestic secret, the police's murky business, the King's secret skeleton. Eleven long years, sir, we have sought from you either freedom or the grave; today, sir, when death has already made her dwelling in my vitals, I beg of you release, or else that I be put out of my misery!…"

When Fitz-Harris had got thus far, the gaolers, who had long been working to wrench him away from the door, finally achieved their purpose, and though he had been quite routed from his station, he was recovering his wind and readying another dart when Patrick, sensing with anguish that enough and more than enough had been said, put his hand over his mouth.... Not a moment too soon. Vinous and choleric fumes

were climbing to the skulls of the honourable lieutenants. They blustered, they caracoled like angry horses. Fitz-Harris, truth be told, had belaboured the scaly backs of these creatures with sufficient vigour to make them spit and bare their poisonous darts.

"Come away, sirs, come away — I can stand no more of this!" cried Monsieur the Lieutenant-General. "For pity's sake, get me out of this breeding-ground of mutiny! For pity's sake, spare me the spectacle of these lunatics! King's Lieutenant, these would-be king-slayers must be pitched straightway into the holes at Bicêtre,[24] until something harsher can be arranged."

"If His Excellency will commit to my care the work of revenging the Crown, and place his trust in me," Monsieur de Rougemont replied with evident pleasure.

And thus the retinue filed away as it had filed in, colliding with the walls here and there as they stumbled forth. Monsieur the Keep's Lieutenant made up the tail of the procession; he wrenched his arms about in fury; his jaws snapped and chattered.

The moment the cell was emptied and Fitz-Harris stood face to face with himself once more, his senses came back to him; but those forces which anger had placed at his disposal fled from him. Suddenly he gave way and dropped onto the

slabs, and sweeping his glance about the chamber, he fell to pouring forth a deluge of tears. He trembled violently. Patrick made haste to raise him, got him into a sitting position, and swathed the unfortunate child again in his rags.

"Ah, my brother," Fitz-Harris spoke then, "we are finished! What did I do? How could you allow me to go on? In my distraction I can no longer say what words I spoke to them, yet I seem to recall saying things most bitter and savage, and that they roared like beasts. Oh, my brother, all is lost! Hide me from sight — they'll be back to put an end to me!..."

"No, my dear fellow," answered Patrick. "Now then, be brave! Steady yourself! Don't be afraid — such men bring about death, but they do not themselves kill."

Roughly three hours past this heated encounter, Monsieur the King's Lieutenant, cane in hand, and the three dungeon warders, each equipped with a club, came crashing without warning into the prison chamber, as though storming a fortress with beating drum and lighted match. The King's Lieutenant was spitting foam.

"Right then! Now we shall settle this, you miserable dogs!" he set to howling, toppling the table with a single hand and shattering the jug with his boot to lend himself a terrible aspect. "Turnkeys, cudgel this base riff-raff soundly for me! A gentleman of birth, one of the King's own men, so affronted

in His Excellency's sight by some shoeless wretch, a miserable worm, a spawn of the streets! Was it your aim, rogue, to get me thrown out of the office to which public respect has appointed me? Was it your wish to deprive a struggling father and provider of his daily bread?..."

On uttering the words "a struggling father" — an expression so often worked to death thereafter — Monsieur de Rougemont infused his voice with a pathetic tremor. Had he been able to expectorate into his own eyes, I rather think that, in his fit of self-commiseration, he would have squeezed out a tear or two.

"You should, you grovelling dog, be flayed whilst yet living, be made to choke on my fist as on a pear of torment,[25] have my cane splintered upon your ribs! Here's for you! — And again! — I'll be the death of you, scum!…"

"Stay your hand, sir! What villainy — to strike down one so ill! Brutal and merciless savage!" cried Patrick, throwing himself between Monsieur the Lieutenant and his friend, whom the caning had stretched upon the flags.

"Here! Warders, here!" Monsieur de Rougemont shouted once more; and two warders threw themselves on Patrick and pummelled him savagely. Patrick did not so much as waver. With a pitying shrug of his shoulders, he simply seized the

Lieutenant for the King's stick defiantly, snapped it across his knee, and flung the broken bits into his face.

During this scene, behind Patrick's back, an act was being perpetrated yet more brutal and base, such as would have become a Burgundian in the epoch of the Armagnacs,[26] such as belonged to those days when, swaddled in a marten-trimmed damask mantle and knife in fist, King Capeluche[27] reigned supreme in the gutter. The third gaoler, a creature born for butchery, had taken hold of Cork, beaten his skull against the chimney-corner and the wall, and was now diverting himself by daubing blood upon Fitz-Harris, stretched lifeless on the planks, rubbing the dead remains of his poor companion over his face. Patrick turned, saw the vile thing being done, and cried out terribly; but Monsieur le Chevalier de Rougemont looked on with a benign and approving smile.

What breast could fail to rise in horror! My quill shakes and falls from my fingers. Here, doubtless, the book will be let drop by many a reader. How am I to blame? The truth does not always come garbed in white satin, like a bride at her nuptials; and, by God and my honour, nothing but the truth has passed my pen — the truth to which I am pledged. When the truth smells of blood and mud, when it is an offence to every decent nostril, I set it down in blood and mud, I let it reek; be it so! I shall not be the one to drench it in sweet

water. Besides, I did not take up my pen to spin perfumed trifles smelling of jasmine and thyme.

This ultimate deed of matchless brutality had chilled Fitz-Harris and Patrick to the bone; they remained motionless and half extinguished, like men who stand waiting for the blow that will finish them. Availing themselves of this stupefaction, two turnkeys snatched up Fitz-Harris and bore him out of the dungeon; and the Lieutenant for the King and the third turnkey, taking Patrick one by each arm, dragged him along in their wake.

Within the Tower of the Superintendency there existed four cells measuring five or six square feet, furnished with beds of solid stone, and at the furthest end a great subterranean chamber into which no entry was possible save through a hole cut in the vault above. Thither, to the rim of the hole — its hatch flung back, a ladder waiting below — the two victims were brought. On reaching this spot, Fitz-Harris came back to himself, and seeing that this was the pit into which he was about to be cast, every fibre of his being rose against it; he cried out, wrenched himself free of the turnkeys, and drew himself upright with a single leap. Patrick, with the unearthly calm of one already resigned to the grave, began of himself to go down the ladder, saying:

"We must die, my brother; my brother, it is God's will that we die! Come!..."

Vanquished by these words, Fitz-Harris stepped towards the hole to do as his friend had done; but as he bent down to seize the uprights of the ladder, someone — the Lieutenant for the King or perhaps one of the gaolers, I am unable to say — dealt him a violent shove, his foot slid from under him, and he went down like a dead weight to the depths below.

The ladder was hauled out, and the hatch fell shut.

[1] *M. de Sartine*: Antoine de Sartine (1729–1801), Lieutenant-General of the Paris Police from 1759 to 1774, widely regarded as one of the most efficient — and ruthless — police chiefs of the Ancien Régime; he maintained an extensive network of informants and was notorious for his use of arbitrary detention.

[2] *Pompignan de Mirabel*: likely a conflation or fictionalisation of historical prisoners at Vincennes; the name does not correspond clearly to a single documented case, which is consistent with Borel's practice of mixing real and invented figures in his prison chronicles.

[3] Henry Masers de Latude (1725–1805): see footnote 7 of chapter IX; his transfer from the Bastille to the harder regime of Vincennes represented a severe deterioration in his conditions. His subsequent escape attempts and eventual liberation made him a celebrated cause in the years leading to the Revolution.

[4] *Fêtes galantes* by Watteau: the celebrated series of paintings by Antoine Watteau (1684–1721) depicting elegantly dressed figures at leisure in parkland settings; the term *fête galante* was

coined specifically for this genre, of which Watteau was the originator and supreme master.

[5] *Bilboquet*: a cup-and-ball toy, a fashionable amusement in eighteenth-century France; the object was to catch a tethered ball in a cup or on a spike. Its inclusion alongside chess and backgammon suggests Fitz-Harris's somewhat undiscriminating enthusiasm.

[6] Enguerrand de Marigny (c. 1260–1315): chief minister of Philip IV of France, executed on the gibbet of Montfaucon after his master's death; his case became a byword for the swift reversal of fortune that awaited the powerful. Borel's point — a king forged the first link, and the last link strangled the crown — collapses five centuries of Vincennes history into a single revolutionary sentence.

[7] *Saturn's ravenous appetite*: in Greek mythology, Cronus (identified with the Roman Saturn) devoured his own children to prevent them from overthrowing him; Rhea tricked him into swallowing a stone in place of the infant Zeus. Fitz-Harris uses the image to suggest that the King's appetite for imprisoning his subjects could easily be outwitted by those who administer his power in his name.

[8] *The Parlement*: the regional supreme courts of Ancien Régime France, of which the Parlement of Paris was the most powerful; they registered royal edicts and possessed the right to remonstrate against legislation. Despite their constitutional role as a check on royal authority, they were frequently

embroiled in theological and factional disputes rather than the defence of individual liberties.

[9] *Jansenius*: Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), Catholic theologian whose posthumously published *Augustinus* sparked the long Jansenist controversy over grace and predestination; the Parlement of Paris became deeply entangled in disputes between Jansenists and Jesuits, often expending more energy on theological casuistry than on matters of justice.

[10] *The oak of Saint Louis*: a reference to the legendary oak tree at Vincennes beneath which Louis IX (Saint Louis, 1214–1270) was said to dispense justice to his subjects without intermediary; the image became a touchstone of the idealised medieval monarch in direct relationship with his people.

[11] *Isabeau and Bois-Bourdon*: Isabeau of Bavaria (1370–1435), queen consort of the mad king Charles VI, was associated in later tradition with the scandalous accusation that Louis de Bois-Bourdon was her lover; he was reputedly executed around 1417 by being sewn in a sack and thrown into the Seine. The story became a standard example of royal court depravity in historical writing of the period.

[12] *Lèse-majesté*: the offence of violating the dignity of a ruling sovereign or the state; derived from the Latin *laesa maiestas* ("violated majesty"), it was a charge of extraordinary breadth under the Ancien Régime, capable of covering almost any expression of disrespect towards the crown or its representatives.

[13] *Limousin*: a region of south-central France whose inhabitants — particularly its itinerant stonemasons and building workers — were proverbially associated in French culture with the building trades, much as the Irish were with navvying in England.

[14] *Pelion on Ossa*: in Greek mythology, the Giants attempted to storm Olympus by piling Mount Pelion upon Mount Ossa; the phrase became proverbial for any impossible accumulation or absurd excess of effort.

[15] *Harpagon the First*: Harpagon is the name of the miser protagonist in Molière's *L'Avare* (1668), whose name became synonymous in French with extreme parsimony and domestic tyranny; Fitz-Harris mockingly elevates de Rougemont to the rank of sovereign miser.

[16] *The bearskin*: an allusion to the French proverb *Il ne faut pas vendre la peau de l'ours avant de l'avoir tué* ("Do not sell the bear's skin before you have killed the bear"), equivalent to the English "Don't count your chickens before they hatch"; Fitz-Harris is mocking de Rougemont for having mentally allocated the prisoners' possessions before he had secured them.

[17] *Barnaville*: a figure from French prison lore, associated with petty tyranny and deliberate provocation of prisoners to justify harsher treatment; the precise reference may be to a historical keeper or to a type established in literature about state prisons.

[18] *Marquis Paulmy d'Argenson*: Antoine-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson (1722–1787), Minister of War and man of letters; his father Marc-René de Voyer de Paulmy d'Argenson (1652–1721) had been the first Lieutenant-General of Police of Paris, notorious for his liberal use of *lettres de cachet*.

[19] *Coromandel*: the south-eastern coastal region of India on the Bay of Bengal; its mention alongside Poland as a source of exotic striped or spotted animals continues Borel's habit of juxtaposing the geographically remote to underline the grotesque.

[20] *De Profundis*: the opening words of Psalm 130 — "Out of the depths" — one of the seven Penitential Psalms, traditionally recited for the dead; its truncation in Patrick's epitaph, where he cannot complete the word, is one of the most quietly devastating moments in the novel.

[21] *Hosanna in excelsis*: "Hosanna in the highest," from the Christian liturgy; used here with bitter irony to mock the Lieutenant-General's raptures over his stolen feast.

[22] *Amphitryon*: the term, derived from Molière's comedy *Amphitryon* (1668), had become proverbial for a lavish host; Molière's line — *le véritable Amphitryon est l'Amphitryon où l'on dîne* ("the true Amphitryon is the one at whose table one dines") — made the name synonymous with magnificent hospitality.

[23] Vincent de Paul (1581–1660): French Catholic priest celebrated for his charitable work among the poor, the sick,

and prisoners; his name became synonymous with selfless philanthropy, which makes Fitz-Harris's application of it to the gluttonous Lieutenant-General a savage irony.

[24] *Bicêtre*: a notorious institution south of Paris that served simultaneously as hospital, prison, and asylum for men; its name carried connotations of the most degraded and hopeless forms of confinement.

[25] *The pear of torment*: a device of disputed historical use, consisting of a pear-shaped metal instrument inserted into the mouth or other orifices and expanded by means of a screw mechanism; its reputation as a torture instrument, whatever its actual history, made it a byword for refinement in cruelty.

[26] *The Armagnacs and Burgundians*: the two rival factions whose civil conflict tore France apart during the reign of the mad king Charles VI, roughly between 1407 and 1435; their struggle, overlapping with the Hundred Years' War, was a byword for factional savagery and lawless brutality.

[27] *Capeluche* (d. 1418): a Parisian skinner who became executioner of the city during the Burgundian seizure of Paris in 1418; notorious for his personal participation in massacres of suspected Armagnac sympathisers, he was himself arrested and executed the same year. His name became a historical emblem of the murderous popular violence unleashed by factional civil war.

XV.

We had left them thus, Deborah and Vengeance, that fearless mother and child newly quit of their chains, Geneviève de Brabant and young Bénoni,[1] delivered from the treacherous Golo's axe, and with them Icolm-Kill the adventurer and his band of comrades, the sloop straining under every sail she possessed. They had lingered close upon a month in the Balearic Islands, and had since weathered seas both kind and cruel — experiences which might of themselves fill a thicker book than this, and one perhaps more thrilling in the reading; we shall, pleading our ignorance of all things maritime, draw a discreet veil over these passages — when the man at the masthead, having at length made out the shores of Ireland, sang out his three-fold cry: Land! Land! Land! And even as on the morning of their departure from Lerins, when a three-fold cry had greeted the sunrise and the crew, bare-headed to a man, had broken into the hymn of their native shore; yet this time the song came

haltingly, and in so subdued and sorrowful a voice that it was barely to be heard. Theirs was no longer a foreign sky, free by virtue of its very foreignness. They were under the sky of their birth, and their birthland lay under the heel of the foreigner. The slave had walked back into the shadow of the lash.

Sir John Chatsworth welcomed Deborah with every mark of genuine satisfaction. He had not, if truth were told, reckoned much upon success; and this despite the courage and the craft he had himself been first to allow in Icolm-Kill. In Sir John Chatsworth there was nothing of the poet, nothing of the adventurer. The words that others lived by — destiny, fortune, Providence — sounded in his ears like the chiming of an empty bell. He did not look upon the world as a place likely to resolve itself well or pleasantly; he was not of those who see life *couleur de rose*, as the French have it; the present, be it never so grim or cheerless, was to him a known quantity, and therefore good enough; as for the future, it was a black murk above a bottomless chasm. He never hoped; he never expected; not once, not ever — and so, for his part, he was never disappointed.

Nothing, however, excited Mr Chatsworth's admiration so much as the extraordinary transformation his ward had undergone. From the young and carefree child he had last set eyes upon at Limerick — a few short months before the

death of her grandfather, Sir Francis Meadowbanks — time and misfortune had between them wrought a great and grave and beautiful lady. Time and again Mr Chatsworth found himself reverting to the subject of this change, and with unstinted praise. It will surprise no one to learn that Deborah chose the softest and most winning words she could find to thank her guardian with all the sincerity and depth of feeling that was in her; and she bestowed upon him so many proofs of an affection so honest and so true that the old lawyer's well-armoured soul was more than once caught off its guard and stirred against its will. The whole of Sir John's household felt the benefit of her coming, for it shed a welcome ray of joy through the place, and gave it, for a few days at least, almost the appearance of a house *en fête*. But a severe sort of joy it was, and a solemn sort of festivity, as was only to be expected in a house such as Sir John's, one of those English establishments where rule and austerity reign without reprieve. This gravity sat in no way ill with that engaging melancholy which the poor young creature wore as though by nature, fitting so naturally as it did to the grief she carried in her heart. Feeling he owed his friends no less, Sir John opened the doors of his reception rooms to them, so that they might come and do homage to his ward. Several dinners were given, several evening receptions held, from which Deborah would most willingly have absented herself had she been free to choose — and yet at every one she shone in the full radiance

of her charms. The tale of her sufferings and her fortitude — she was, it must be remembered, a beautiful woman of rank held captive by the state — stirred the liveliest emotions of sympathy, whilst adding to her natural charms a secret and altogether irresistible power. The first weeks after her homecoming went by in this manner — occasionally swept up in the commotion of society, but most often spent in the peaceful giving and receiving of those tender tokens of friendship and gratitude, and in the confidential remembrance of all the days that had gone before.

It was now that Deborah came to hear that her father, Lord Cockermouth, no longer made his home in Ireland. His decision had in all probability been forced by her disappearance, since it had ruined the whole effect he had counted upon from the Tralee trial, dearly bought though that verdict had been. The sole object of his return to Killarney had been to effect a hasty sale of the manor before betaking himself to London, to which place some of his erstwhile fellow-revellers had long been urging him to come and make his home, ever since his wife had died; for the want of Anna Meadowbanks had awoken in some obscure chamber of his heart a sorrow tolerably sincere, together with regrets which had often, try as he might to suppress them, made themselves felt even in his written communications. At the root of things — for one must be fair — Lord Cockermouth had not been

entirely devoid of feeling for either wife or daughter. That he had caused his wife pain was not to be denied; but he had never deliberately taken it upon himself to torment the poor gentle soul. Never had he said within himself: I will use her badly; I will repay her tenderness, her self-sacrifice, her meek acceptance, with thanklessness and spite. Hers had been a melancholy and painful existence for no other reason than this: she had been thrown into union with a creature slow-witted, crude, and violent by turns, and her tender and fastidious nature had been obliged to endure the governance of an unsparing and pedestrian tyrant utterly unlike anything she had ever dreamed of. By arrangement of family interest, the gentle dove had been matched with an ox and set to ploughing. If Deborah, his daughter, had suffered at his hands, it was not for want of all paternal affection on his part — the blame rested with Patrick. For all his rough-hewn appearance and his commonplace manners, this peer of the realm harboured, as we have remarked elsewhere, the most overweening pride and the most exalted notions of his noble rank. Within him dwelt a feeling — crude and unrefined, but utterly immovable — for the honour of his line and lineage, and this vigorous and uncompromising instinct had not allowed him to temporise over his daughter's connexion. The very notion that the son of a cattle-drover, of a tiller of the soil, could be on terms of friendship with Deborah — and might even aspire to be her lover, her husband — was

repugnant to him in the extreme, and it set ablaze in him a righteous anger, an outrage animated by something approaching noble fervour — as one may have remarked — quite out of keeping with the ordinary run of his temper. The situation must have presented itself to his mind as utterly calamitous, and the dishonour menacing his family blazon must have seemed to him both unavoidable and of monstrous proportions, that he should have descended to being party to — even if he did not expressly direct — the unsuccessful attempt upon Patrick's life in that deep-sunken lane near Killarney. For this blunt and flinty-hearted brute, who would cheerfully enough profit by the liberties war affords, had nevertheless always felt a distaste for naked injustice. Yet once that first act of injustice had been done, once he stood implicated in that miserable affair, he had undoubtedly felt himself compelled — ever so careful as he was of his family's renown and his personal honour — to press forward, in the hope of freeing himself from that dreadful pass, all the while knowing full well in his inmost heart what that evil action was worth, until he was brought to engineer — or more accurately, to buy — the judgement handed down by the judges at Tralee, a judgement that had pronounced Patrick the would-be murderer of Deborah, now fled from justice. Yes, running through all these events, it has to be confessed, there had been in Lord Cockermouth a measure of true feeling for Deborah, and the terrible

distraction that had taken hold of him when he returned to the feasting-hall, a distraction bordering on madness, which had caused him to make such an unseemly spectacle of himself before his assembled guests, and to pull out with such utter disregard his sword, the blood not yet dried upon the steel, had proceeded above all from the bitter anguish that had gripped his very soul when he beheld his daughter so frightfully disfigured by that witless cut-throat, Chris. Once that lamentable stroke had fallen, he had seen to it with genuine gladness that she received the most affectionate nursing, so that she might live and her injuries be made to vanish; and if, scarcely recovered, she had been brought by him to the Tralee Assizes, it was that an urgent compulsion — in his own eyes at least — had given him no liberty to act otherwise.

Either the castle edifice, in the main of immemorial age, was in such want of repair as to daunt any purchaser; or else it was that a sort of superstitious dread had deterred anyone from taking up residence in what was regarded as a cursed spot, lately inhabited by a spectre, a creature in league with the Devil — for common gossip, which has a way of blackening and inflating all it touches, had turned the old commodore into all of this and something more terrible besides — whatever the case, the Earl of Cockermouth had failed to discover anyone willing to buy. Yet as he had already made the

matter known, and rather than have his word publicly disproved, he had parcelled out his handsome domain and disposed of it bit by bit to the peasantry round about. The seigneurial dwelling house itself had been bought by tenant farmers as so much building stock; they had torn it down and used the stone to raise walls round their little holdings. Just a few of the ground-level halls had been left standing, and these were put to use as granaries and stables; nowadays a man might search and find scarcely a remnant, and he would be hard put to it to unearth, in the back of some wretched cabin, a single greybeard who remembered the Cockermouths at all. Thus came to nothing this great pile, which had risen there time out of mind, for so many ages that it seemed ageless, like the old oaks in the forest. Thus fell Cockermouth Castle, as fall so many structures in our midst, so many of those splendid clocks built of stone, which seem to stand there for the sole purpose of tallying the generations as they pass, even as a dial tallies the hours gone by. Thus it was with Cockermouth Castle, and thus it is with the fairest and most venerable creations — cut down by the scythe of the years and the scythe of human hands: such is the common inheritance of all things. The sword that won empires is tossed upon the scrap-pile; the castle whose battlements once seemed to assault heaven itself is levelled to a man's height; donkeys bray where once the throne stood, and the kingly

tomb, half-swallowed by the soil, ends its days as a vessel for swill.

It happened one day that Deborah was alone in the sitting-room; she had taken a chair by the hearth and was reading, whilst Vengeance romped and rolled at her feet on a leopard-skin rug. In came Mr Chatsworth; he dragged a chair softly over the floor and placed himself at her side. Deborah laid aside her book with a respectful gesture and made a small bow, whereupon Mr Chatsworth took her hand in his, squeezed it affectionately, and began:

"It has been a good while, madam, since your guardian first wished to speak with you on a delicate matter; yet, as he had no wish to rush things, he has chosen to wait quietly for a proper occasion rather than create one himself. This is a fitting time, and this a fitting place; I ask you to hear me: Do you think of me as your friend?"

"I should be mad to think otherwise, sir."

"And do you believe me so much your friend as to place your wellbeing and your honour above all other considerations?"

"I do, sir."

"The truth is, I find myself obliged to speak of things exceedingly delicate, madam, things to which no man on earth could claim the right to allude unless he were situated as I am

with respect to you, and unless you placed in him the confidence you have been generous enough to place in me. At your feet there, madam, sits a lovely child whom I care for as much as I care for you — you must believe that — and on whose behalf I stand ready to do all that I should do for yourself; and now your friend must speak a hard and painful word to you: this lovely child must be sent away from you, he must be caused to disappear."

"Who asks for such a thing?"

"The world, madam."

"The world!"

"The world, madam, and your reputation."

"The world and my reputation! You speak in riddles, sir."

"The world lives by laws, madam, and honour is implacable; and the world, and your honour, and what lies before you in life — all these things demand that you should make this sacrifice."

Hearing this, Deborah threw herself on her knees at her child's side and, hugging him fiercely to her, rained kisses and tears upon him.

"You — my Vengeance, my Patrick, my son, my heart's treasure, my very soul — to forsake you! Oh no, never, never!"

"He must be taken away from you, madam; but I am not saying that he need be lost to you for ever."

"Your meaning is quite clear to me, sir."

"The fact that this child was ever born, that he even exists, is something of which the world is wholly ignorant. I have, since your coming, contrived — though I gave you no reason for it — to keep the child away from prying eyes; we must not broadcast what Heaven, in its gracious wisdom, has chosen to keep secret; let me have this sweet child; I shall see him raised quietly and out of public view at first, and by and by I shall bring him close to me again, and I shall tend him, and guard him, and cherish him as if he had sprung from my own loins. People will suppose him to be the offspring of some far-removed and needy cousin, or perhaps an orphan I have made my ward."

"It is a great and liberal offer, Sir John, and I give you my warmest thanks; yet I feel rising up in me something immense, something past my understanding, which revolts at the mere idea of such a course, and which will never suffer me to agree to it. I allow that such a thing might preserve the look of respectability; those who judge by appearances alone might well be appeased; but my own heart would find no rest in it, and it would not save me from remorse."

"You look at this the wrong way, my lady; an error — and let us be clear, it is an error — may bring remorse in its train; but there is no remorse to be had in setting an error right."

"An error! What manner of talk is this? I have done nothing wrong. What in heaven's name do you mean? I took a husband of my own free will, my friend, my beloved; I loved him dearly, and there before you is the offspring of that love — an offspring I cherish! And what I did, I did of my own volition, and I am incapable of willing an error: there is nothing here that needs erasing, sir."

"Looked at from above, my dear lady, it is quite possible that nature sees no wrong in this; but we are not living beside the Saint Lawrence here, and in the world's reckoning it is a wrong."[2]

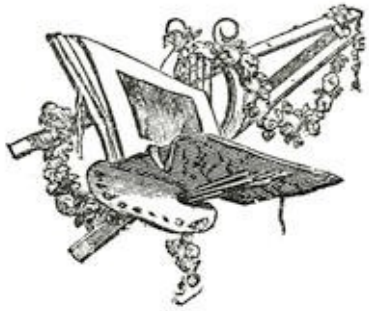
"In the world's reckoning? What wretchedness! Oh, how deeply I despise them all! I have so much to be thankful to them for, truly; I must be sure not to offend them. No, no, my child — no, my Vengeance — I shall never deny you! You shall not be left without a mother! I will not have you calling me 'madam'! I will not buy myself a false reputation for purity by denying you! Do not pursue this, my dear guardian; you are putting me through unspeakable anguish! I am this child's mother — mother — mother — and his mother is all I mean to be! I have no designs on a second marriage; let others leave me be, as I leave them be. There is an end of it! I live for my

son, I grieve for Patrick, and beyond that there is nothing! You have a good heart, Sir John, and I care for you deeply; but let us have done with this subject; you are a respectable, orderly man, and I am a creature of unreason! You are an archon,[3] and I — I am only a hapless Sappho."[4]

Sir John, stirred to his very soul and on the verge of tears, drew mother and child close to his heart — Geneviève de Brabant and her son Bénoni — and spoke to them:

"This may hurt my feelings, it may give pain to some part of my heart; yet it robs you of neither my affection nor my loyalty; in this life and the next, I am devoted to you; let there be peace between us; give me a kiss, dear little one! And you, my poor lady, let us embrace!"

And thereafter good Sir John Chatsworth, who possessed an understanding both keen and generous, let the matter drop and made no further reference to anything of the sort. Upon that subject there fell an eternal silence.

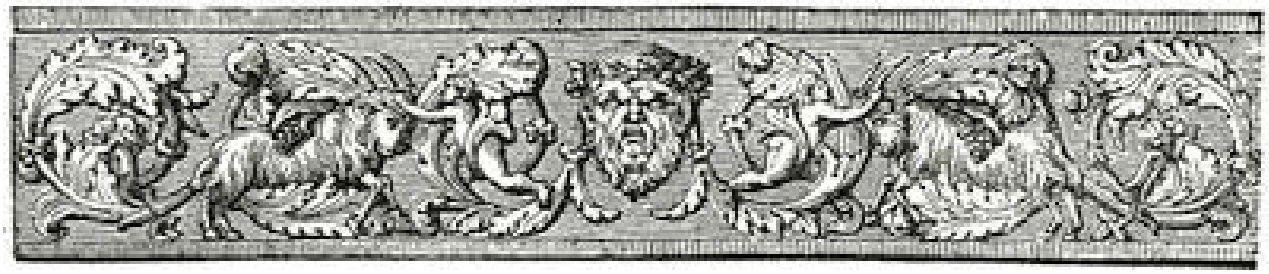


[1] *Geneviève de Brabant and Bénoni*: the heroine of a widely diffused medieval legend, Geneviève is the wife of a count palatine who is falsely accused of adultery during her husband's absence and condemned, but survives in hiding for years with her child, miraculously sustained until her innocence is discovered and she is restored to honour. *Bénoni* — the name given to the child in some versions — means "son of my sorrow" in Hebrew (Genesis 35:18), where it is the name Rachel gives her son at the moment of her death before Jacob renames him Benjamin. The resonance with Deborah's child, named Vengeance, is pointed.

[2] *"We are not living beside the Saint Lawrence here"*: an allusion to the indigenous peoples of North America, with whom Europeans of the Enlightenment contrasted the supposed moral simplicity of nature against the social hypocrisy of civilisation; the Saint Lawrence river being the gateway to Canada and the New World. Sir John's remark acknowledges Deborah's logic while insisting on the constraints of the society they actually inhabit.

[3] *Archon*: in ancient Athens, one of the chief magistrates of the city; the term carries connotations of orderly, rule-bound governance, which is exactly the character Deborah attributes to Sir John.

[4] *Sappho*: the lyric poet of Lesbos (c. 630–570 BC), celebrated in antiquity as the greatest of women poets and associated with passionate personal verse; she became, in later tradition, an emblem of the woman who lives by feeling and genius rather than by social convention.



XVI.

They heard the ladder scrape upward and the trap-door thunder shut, and then there was nothing — nothing but darkness, deep and entire.

"O God! O God!..." he gasped; and in an instant Patrick was on his knees, his face pressed to the very ground. Terror and dread had, by sheer surprise, breached the defences of his stoic nature and let despair come flooding in; but his courageous reason was quick to reclaim its throne, and he rid his heart of that unworthy impulse as promptly and deliberately as one might pick a splinter from one's finger. Rising, he let the sound of groaning lead him through the impenetrable darkness to where Fitz-Harris lay; he called to him and held his breath to hear. Not a word came back to him. He bent down and felt for his hand; when he found it, it was cold to the touch. He stepped away from him and, one hand sliding along the rough wall to steady himself, felt his way to a corner of the dungeon, where he shoved aside with

his foot the straw, or the foul and reeking muck that passed for straw, that had been strewn across the ground with what one might grimly call consideration. Having laid his friend down upon this miserable litter as tenderly as he was able, and settled his head as one settles a sick man's head upon his pillow, he called to him again — and again there was no response. Such was the sum of all he could give him. He lay down at his side, then, in an inexpressible torment of anxiety, testing the heartbeat minute by minute, listening in absolute silence to the shallow breathing, waiting with a wretched vigilance for that supreme moment when his friend should at last have ceased to suffer, should have moved on from so sorrowful a human lot — from the hardest lot a man may bear — to a condition almost enviable by comparison: that of the dead. How long he remained thus in that pitiless watch he could not afterwards have said; but in the end a sleep heavy as lead, with which he fought hand to hand, conquered him and drew him down into oblivion.

When he opened his eyes, Fitz-Harris was groaning aloud, and the sound had enough strength in it to be almost welcome; his hands and feet had lost their deathly chill. Patrick laid his hand softly on his forehead and, speaking almost under his breath, said to him:

"Harris! Harris, my dear fellow!..."

At this, Fitz-Harris moved at last. He rallied slowly, in fits and starts; and when he had come round entirely and knew what was about him, Patrick put it to him:

"You had a terrible fall, my brother, a frightful one. Where are you hurt? Tell me where the pain is."

"My loins pain me greatly, and in my head there are stabbing pains that clash and cross like a pair of duelling swords. Here — feel that, on my head."

Patrick ran his hand thither with all possible gentleness; the hair was sodden with blood, and beneath it his fingers met a swelling of alarming size and the raw lips of a wound.

"Do you know, my brother, where they have put us?"

"You ask me where we are? In a dungeon pit, my brother — a dungeon as deep as they dig them."

"And what do they mean to do with us?"

"Have you quite forgotten, my brother, that His Majesty's Lieutenant took it upon himself to see the Crown revenged? There is your answer — they are avenging the Crown."

"Is it the middle of the night, Patrick, or has God deprived me of my eyes?"

"No — God has not struck you as He struck His servant Tobit;[1] but as to the hour, my brother, I know no more than

you; this pit has no loophole and no skylight, not the smallest crack to judge by."

"A tomb, then — they have buried us alive."

"Less than a tomb, my brother — a cesspit with no way out, a stinking, sunken pit."

"A cesspit!" Fitz-Harris repeated, and there was a tremor of horror in the word. "A foul pit! So the Crown is avenged by means of foul pits!"

"Aye, with cesspits. You have it exactly."

What passed in their souls at those words, and how dreadful it was, I cannot presume to tell; they both fell into a silence long and dark and utterly without comfort.

Fitz-Harris it was who spoke first:

"I make no doubt — they have buried us here to let us rot of famine. Very well! All the better for it! It is past time that all this wretchedness had a stop. Come along, death, and be quick about it! A precious long time the fickle creature keeps one waiting! You would think her some mealy-mouthed, over-nice, missish creature, who makes a great business of choosing whom she will receive! Whether they toss us a crust or leave us to rot, I care not a straw either way. I have had my fill of suffering — I want an end of it; I swear, if ever I lift so much as a morsel to my lips, let them call me the basest coward alive!"

"That is an oath you will not keep, my brother," said Patrick, sadly. "To be killed is one thing, honourable even, but to let oneself die is quite another, and a shameful one; and besides, you do not know what it is to starve."

Days and nights — several of each, or so it seemed to them — had gone by in that darkness, and still no one had come, and no sound had penetrated to them from any quarter save such as they themselves had made, as if they had been sealed into the living rock. The pangs of inanition had already begun their work; the very faculty of thought had grown sluggish and effortful; ideas came, but they came singly and refused to join. Towards this time, Patrick, who had himself been seized on several occasions by faintness, which he had carefully kept to himself, took Fitz-Harris by the hand and said to him:

"I have till now refused to think, as you thought, that we were thrown into this abyss with the settled purpose of letting us die in it — but the truth of it is now before me; you saw it rightly. And the better to debase us to the rank of brutes, they deliver us to death as they would deliver a beast — with no priest, no counsel, with no hand to hold. Their trouble is for nothing! Those who have lived as we have lived and suffered as we have suffered will not be found wanting in that supreme moment, they will not throw off the dignity that becomes a

man; they will know how to die. Brother — let us ready ourselves to meet our Maker."

With that, Patrick knelt, and having composed himself in silence for a moment, he continued:

"I have gone down in spirit, O Lord, into the very bottom of my soul and found it plain and open before me; I have searched it from end to end for some mortal offence, and encountered nothing but failings of the kind Thy mercy will not withhold its pardon from. I do not say, O Lord, that I am better than my fellow men or more worthy in Thine eyes; but the world has had me for so short a time that sin has not found its full occasion in me. Any whom I have offended in the short passage of my life, any to whom I have been a stumbling-block — I beg your pardon humbly; forgive me as I forgive those who set themselves against me, as I forgive those who have brought me to this end. To you, my brother Fitz-Harris — what have I to tell you, but that I bless you and keep you in my heart, as I know you bless me and keep me in yours? It has pleased Thee, O Lord, to crown the hardest of lives with the most pitiless of deaths; Thy will be done! Since die I must, I die — and I die in hope. Thou didst give me a friend — a beloved one, O Lord — and then Thou didst part us; and Thou dost bid me die without ever setting eyes upon her more! O Lord, how bitter!... To die, and never to see her again!... Ah!... cold, cold that blade!... It enters so slowly —

and cuts so deep!… O my God! — O my God! — O my God!..."

His voice failed him then, stifled in his tears. At that, Fitz-Harris took up the word, in a voice of frank and unabashed hardihood:

"I, O God, am not dying resigned, as my brother dies — and I die without hope. Better one real thing than two imagined ones, say I — I am frank, O God: I had rather have sat down to an apple on my own table than chased after an orange in the garden of the Hesperides.[2] I shall not look back on what is past, my brother — it is done with and, I believe, atoned for. Only this I will say to you, my sweet Patrick — that I love you; and that since die we must, both of us, I count it a happiness to die at your side."

"Let us embrace, my brother — for the last time," said Patrick; and, drawing himself to Fitz-Harris and bending low over him, they gave one another a long, long kiss — the sharp and burning kiss of farewell, of a farewell that is forever, the kiss that is given between two friends on the floor of the scaffold, in the space between the block and the falling axe. At last their lips drew apart; Patrick lay down again beside his friend, and there upon their wretched bed of dung, their hands held gently together, they lay like two effigies cut into the side of a sepulchre, their souls undone by suffering, their bodies hollowed out by hunger, and once more, in a kind of

cold stillness, they set themselves to await death, which was making its way towards them, unhurried, step by slow step.

A long silence followed — long, and then longer still. The pain had now reached such a pitch that even Patrick could not keep back his moans, whilst Fitz-Harris wept openly.

"You are in much pain, my Harris? We must be brave!" Patrick would say to him. And Fitz-Harris would reply: "It is my wounds chiefly, and then the hunger — somewhat — besides."

"Courage, my Harris! Only a few more hours of this torment, and we shall have drained the bitter cup to its lees; it will all be over. Death comes but once to a man — courage, my brother!"

"Courage I have, my Patrick — and cruel as this death is, I accept it willingly, because death is a full stop. I have it, I tell you! I could die just as well of my own deliberate choosing. Set before me the richest and most tempting game upon a silver platter, and I should push it away with scorn."

"O my poor friend! Let us not turn our thoughts that way — it only puts a keener edge on one's hunger."

After these words came a new silence, or what passed for silence, being in truth a renewed succession of groans. Our two poor martyrs still clung to each other hand in hand.

Death would not come; yet hunger, with its iron rake, tore at their vitals without mercy. All of a sudden the vault's trap-door was lifted; a pale wash of torchlight gradually invaded the darkness of the pit; something on a rope came down from above; and a familiar voice — the voice of a turnkey — cried from without: "Your pittance — here — take it." So sudden was it that they both cried out. It seemed to them that it was from Heaven itself that this word had come. For a little while the thing swung there, a few feet from the floor, and then was pulled back up; then, a moment after, something was tossed down from above, and the trap-door closed upon them once more.

"What is it — what?" cried Fitz-Harris.

"I have no idea," said Patrick.

"Then go and see, my brother."

It was no small exertion for Patrick to drag himself on his knees to the place from which the sound had come, and when his groping hand found what had been dropped:

"Bread!" he exclaimed. "It is bread!"

"Bread!" Fitz-Harris took up the word with a rattling moan of joy. "Bread! Bread! O all the saints! Give me some, my brother — give me some! Hunger — it is a frightful thing! And then — you see how it is — it was all a lie; I have no wish to die."

No very great length of time appeared to have gone by — the following day, in all likelihood — when the vault was opened once more; down came a rope, as before, with bread hanging from it, and this time it was Patrick who made his way over to untie it. Thenceforward they were rarely left to suffer so long without sustenance; their daily provision came to them with fair enough regularity: three or four ounces of sorry bread, that is to say, brought to them every so often.

As though to put the finishing touch upon the hideousness of their condition, great rats — growing, it seemed, more numerous by the day — dwelt in or prowled about the same foul pit. These vile companions, objects of the most intense aversion to both men, pestered them incessantly and without a shred of pity, their impudence and familiarity growing ever more offensive. The water jug, on whose neck the prisoners balanced their bread by way of safeguard, became the rallying point of these creatures; in their savage persistence they would often topple it entirely, or else close whatever gap stood between them and their prize by piling themselves upon one another in a writhing heap. During their sleep, or in those hours of silent exhaustion when all strength had left them, the rats would clamber over their bodies, gnaw and rip at their clothes, and leave their faces and hands covered in bites. It was Fitz-Harris who bore the worst of it, being able to stir only with great effort; the

brutes seemed to sense his helplessness and act upon it — they paid no heed to his cries and set upon him without ceremony, as they might have set upon a dead body. The damp floor and the rotting straw on which he lay without respite gradually stiffened his legs and robbed them of all movement, and though his body from the waist up was wasted to a degree horrible to tell, his legs became as it were dropsical, and swelled to an extraordinary degree. So enormous did his feet become that Patrick had to strip off his shoes, for they gripped his feet as a thumbscrew grips the thumb. But with his feet laid bare, a worse affliction was at hand. Again and again, famished packs of rats hurled themselves upon those bare feet, and though Fitz-Harris cried out and Patrick struggled to beat them off, the darkness was against him, and they gnawed and mangled his toes. I will not press upon the full horror of this torment; it is common knowledge how intimately the heart is bound up with the extremities, and how keen and overwhelming is the anguish of tetanic spasm. Patrick found no way to shield Fitz-Harris entirely from this ferocity but to bury his feet in the litter and heap over it a covering of earth, which, with all the tenacious patience that imprisonment, and imprisonment alone, can give a man, he had scraped up from the floor with his fingernails, grain by grain.

There is something in our living nature that resists death with great stubbornness. It is seldom that death wins us in a pitched engagement. Only after a great deal of underhand working and many a struggle does it lay us low at last. Short of the blade or the poisoned cup, killing a man is no simple business — least of all a young man, a dare-devil like Fitz-Harris, born for the longest of lives, sound and strong in every limb, his every vital spring fresh-forged and of the purest steel. So far gone was he in those last days in the octagonal chamber that any observer would have given him but a little while to live. Had a medical man seen him, he would not have reckoned him good for more than a few weeks. And yet from that point onwards he had survived a hideous fall, had gone without food for days on end, and had spent many months lying on wet filth in a foul pit without a ray of light or a breath of air, crushed by bodily suffering, eaten alive by the monotony and the most bottomless despair, with nothing to gauge the time by — time that scarcely moved — save his imagination alone, that mad thing which takes every suffering and multiplies it, amplifies it, exaggerates it beyond all bounds; and subsisting, as we know, on nothing but water and the occasional few ounces of inferior bread. For a time he had seemed to hold on, to subsist in more or less the same condition — unchanged for better or worse — even as Patrick wore himself away and fell into an evident consumption before one's eyes, like an infant torn from its

mother's breast, or rather, I should perhaps say, like a man wrenched from the fruitful breast of liberty; then suddenly he had gone into a sharp decline, and declined from day to day with frightening rapidity. But the closer his poor body came to its final dissolution, the more his awareness of his plight slipped from him, and the further his spirit receded from any thought of death. What ailed him was to his own mind no more than a passing indisposition: in a voice barely alive he said he felt his vigour returning; his horizon was clearing, his sky was growing populous with stars; only a few more hours in this pit and he would be free; he was sure of it; he could see his deliverance coming towards him; and coming it was indeed — but what a deliverance!... Poor fellow — poor young man!

Instead of relinquishing his hold on the things of this life, he had a head full of nothing but plans: for furnishing his rooms, ordering his wardrobe, appointing his carriage, and equipping himself for the hunt. How the gold required for such extravagance was to be found never troubled him once; such a question was far too frigid, too earthbound, to find any purchase on his mind. What would fully revive the somewhat battered bloom of his youth was plain enough — he must never again leave the saddle; he must graft himself, like a centaur, onto some fiery and frisking Andalusian — the handsomest jennet[3] in all the Spains. This jennet, of whatever

coat, must be fitted with a bossed bit, shoes of silver, a saddle of magnificent workmanship, a caparison of the richest Irish tartan, a velvet housing, a fly-fringe of golden netting; and it was never to be seen abroad without a posy of roses between its ears. To accompany all this were boots of exquisite make; spurs such as Saint Eloi[4] himself might have forged; a long Turkish fowling-piece, inlaid with marquetry, sculpted, chased, nielloed, and damascened;[5] a brace of belt-pistols; holster-pistols; a hunting-knife bearing a device upon the blade; an ivory whistle; and a full-toned huntsman's horn. His burning concern was to show himself at Chantilly on the coming Saint Hubert's Day,[6] and for that purpose he must bespeak a surcoat of green velvet with gold passementerie.[7] He lulled himself unceasingly upon the most captivating of fancies. Extravagant whims and glorious imaginings rose and broke and gave way to one another in his mind like the rolling of the sea. He wove long strings of romance in which he was invariably the daring hero, and which invariably ended with him deep in the lap of pleasure and at the pinnacle of good fortune; and these airy fictions, with all their additions, amendments, and variations, he told to Patrick with an artless simplicity that was all his own.

The prince, deep in the forest on the chase, was hotly pursuing a doe and her fawns when he lost his way. Cut off from the rest of the hunt, alone in a remote forest-clearing,

he was set upon by a maddened boar; but at the very moment the creature was about to wound him, Fitz-Harris — present at the spot by some happy providence impossible to account for — put both pistols into the animal's flank and buried his knife in its throat. Delivered by so miraculous a stroke, and overflowing with magnificent gratitude to his courageous preserver, the prince took Fitz-Harris into his personal service, loaded him with riches, and, receiving him into his closest intimacy, made of him a favourite who was feared, powerful, and held in the highest admiration. — In all these favourable turns of fortune, Patrick was never forgotten; Fitz-Harris always made the most splendid room for him at his side. — Far away on the horizon, a woman, light-footed as a doe, was springing across a tree cast like a bridge between two rocks over a rushing torrent; but, having gained the very middle of that terrible crossing, her light foot slipped; she fell, and the waters closed over her. Fitz-Harris, who chanced to be gathering narcissi on the bank, caught sight of her; an unnameable sympathy thrilled through him at once; he ran to the spot, plunged headlong into the torrent, dived and dived again. When a pair of arms twined themselves about him, he rose to the surface, and raised from the waters the most lovely head and the most beautiful young bosom that any man could have wished to behold. By the doubtful shimmer of the silver moon, Fitz-Harris, seized by a heavenly ecstasy, gazed in rapt bewilderment upon this pale Ophelia;[8] he pressed his loving

lips to her cold and upturned brow with a trembling of almost reverential tenderness, and drew her gently to the shore. There a wicker vessel awaited, its sides covered with chamois-skins dyed purple; in it Fitz-Harris gently laid the swooning girl. Her garments, of conspicuous richness, indicated a maiden of the noblest quality. Fitz-Harris took the skiff in tow and betook himself to knock at the gate of a manor house hard by. She was, as it turned out, the sole and cherished daughter of the lord of that very manor. The lord of the manor wept over his daughter, embraced Fitz-Harris with great fervour, and called him son without more ado. Isabelle recovered her senses, and with gratitude and love combining their sweet office upon her heart, she offered Fitz-Harris her hand — and what a hand to be offered; and so Fitz-Harris passed a life spun of gold and silk, in the tranquil bliss of married love and the wild exhilaration of the chase.

All these extravagances, these dreams, were the handiwork of the creeping fever that was stealing him from the world: he had not long left in which to share them. So feeble had his voice become that it was nothing more now than the sound of expelled air: to link two words together was almost beyond his strength. The pitiful state to which Fitz-Harris had been brought filled Patrick with the keenest anxiety on his behalf. A cruel parting was now at hand, and he had until now barely let his mind rest upon the idea; the loss

of his companion in misfortune he had only ever perceived indistinctly, as a distant and uncertain possibility. He was crushed by it. He was desperate to bring to the knowledge of the King's Lieutenant — hoping that the news might perhaps touch his heart — the mortal danger in which Fitz-Harris now found himself; but since there was no way of making this known to the gaoler who brought their food without at the same time terrifying the poor dying man and robbing him of his consoling dreams, he kept sadly silent; and, much as a mariner whose vessel the storm has wrecked, and who from the shore where the waves have flung him is compelled to stand helpless while he watches a ship wrench at its cables and go under, he looked on at the wreck of Fitz-Harris, whose hull was vanishing by slow degrees beneath the swelling tide of death. At last chance brought it about that Fitz-Harris was sleeping at the very hour the turnkey arrived; Patrick caught at the opportunity, and, dropping to his knees beneath the hatch, beneath the trap-door:

"In Heaven's name, gaoler, I implore you!" he cried. "Remember that we are men, your own kind, flesh and bone as yourself, and think what they are making us bear. In the name of Heaven! If you are not made of stone, if the least remnant of pity is still alive in you, go and tell — do me the grace of taking word to your master, the Lieutenant for the King, that my brother Fitz-Harris is dying; that he hangs

between life and death; one hour more in this sewer and he is past saving! Go — save him! Go, beseech the King's Lieutenant on your knees as I beseech you on mine; perhaps his vengeance has had its fill by now, perhaps his hatred is sated, and perhaps he does not wish for this man's blood. Friend, get a ladder, get a torch, come down into this horror — see for yourself what our wretchedness is, and you will not be able to think of it afterwards without weeping. For Heaven's sake, gaoler — save him! Save my brother! He is your brother as well — for we are men! For we are all of one flesh! Go — and you will be blessed!"

But the gaoler said nothing, and no answer ever came. Whether he placed the message before the King's Lieutenant, or whether he took no notice of it at all, is more than I know. Patrick clenched his teeth in fury and bitter disappointment. Ashamed, he blushed in the court of his own conscience — as a man blushes when he has fallen into error — at having been drawn by his zeal for Fitz-Harris to make a humble supplication, he who had never in his life made such a thing, and at having made it to a mere lackey, and for having made it to no purpose whatsoever.

Fitz-Harris's extraordinary sleep went on for a very long while: it was, in all probability, a lethargic trance, and when at last he came out of it he had recovered both his faculties and his power of speech.

"Good God! Patrick!" he said, his voice startlingly strong. "There is a great gap opened in the wall of this vault! Look at it — how far one sees; how the gaze loses itself in all that vastness; what a beautiful sight it is! That green emerald set in the Ocean — what can it be? O God! It is Ireland herself. See it there on its fair shore — our wild Kerry, facing the sun like a flower? The fragrance of it — it comes straight to my heart! What balm there is in the very air! No more the rank miasma of a sewer: this is the mountain air, free and unfettered, this is the pure air of home: *Spiorad-naom!* How suddenly the day has clouded over! How swiftly night has come. *Spiorad-naom!* Where have we come to, Patrick? Ah! In Killarney — Killarney sleeping. How quiet it is! All the world is asleep. Do you recognise Killarney, Patrick? Killarney the simple, Killarney the haughty? Here we are, in one of those narrow, crooked streets of hers. Who is that coming out of that ramshackle house? *Spiorad-naom!* Donald — my brigand of a brother. His hand swings a stick that wheels and whistles. Three companions follow him. What a picture they make, what a dishevelled, slouching set! Do you see how they reel and stagger? The scoundrel — will he never pass a night anywhere but in low dens and taverns? God! Here is the street of my birth; here the roof of my birth; here the chamber where I first saw the world! My poor old mother sits wakeful by a dying fire, her rosary at hand. How calm, how sad that beautiful face — the symbol of a blameless soul! What a

living image of virtue! She keeps her anxious vigil, the tender creature, watching for my brother, her son Donald, who, with no thought for her suffering, is even now roaming those ill-frequented streets of the town! She weeps! Weeping for me, I dare say. Her soul is imprisoned with mine; my sufferings are hers; my shackles are fixed to her feet — she drags my chains wherever she goes; she has given me up for lost. I am here — here! Poor woman! Weep no more, my mother! The walls of my cell have tumbled down. Mourn no more, weep no more! Her son is restored to her — they are together, mother and son! Press him close to your heart, poor mother; it is he, none other — it is Kildare, it is your Harris. Let me kiss your lips of honey, your white hair; let me lay myself at your feet and rest upon your lap this aged, darkened head of mine, as once I rested upon it my rosy, golden-haired head of old. Day is breaking again; Patrick, look — the Kenmare road; the sun is coming up; it is as if smithies had been set ablaze upon the mountain-tops — what magnificence! I had all but forgotten the sun existed. What beauty this is! Glory to Thee, God of this world, glory to Thee thrice! Rain down upon us your fire and your light — warm us, revive us, make us green again! Tyranny has left us to moulder in the dark. Hail to you, steep crags, bold summits, round stony hillocks, deep valleys, thick woods, where we first dared set our steps, where in our wandering rambles we so often cried out with all our lungs to make the echo ring, rebounding from hill to hill. Look,

Patrick — from here one can see all of Lough Leane,[9] the lovely lake of Killarney! The sea, carried up and set among the mountains. What peace! What stillness! Your very image, Patrick: warring elements locked within, battles fought there in secret, but not a ripple shows upon the surface. Yonder the high ridges of the MacGillycuddy's Reeks and Carrauntoohil[10] climb the sky; but the towers of Cockermouth Castle are still lost in the early mist. That tumble of mossy stones — are those not the solitary ruins of the Priory? And hard by, that roof with its curl of smoke — is that not your father's cottage, Patrick? What happiness, to behold all this again! O God — how beautiful a man's own country is!... Am I the dupe of some mad dream? A magnificence wholly unknown to me unfurls before my eyes like a fan and blinds me with its dazzle. A sweet rose-tinged breeze stirs a cloud of golden dust that spreads over the whole of nature. Look! In that enchanted forest, upon that hill of marble — do you see Diana the divine huntress, her bow in her hand, her opal crescent gleaming on her brow? Three beautiful white greyhounds, carved from ivory as it would seem, keep pace with her swift feet. How magnificently her head is turned upon her shoulder! Phoebe! O Phoebe! — my goddess!… Look up, Patrick — up there, higher still — do you see that angel cutting across the vault of heaven like an arrow, his lips to the mouth of a long golden trumpet; what a blaze of sound he strews among the stars! Can you hear those

harmonies, high up in the sky — voices and instruments together? All scintillates, all flashes like a great ruby; all glows and shimmers, all sways and ripples, all drifts in a shimmer of gold. All this magnificence — it is the very robe of God! These purples — they are the purples of Heaven. A woman, dark and veiled, is walking slowly along the bank of a crystal stream; she holds a cluster of scabious flowers threaded through a ring of gold. I have a feeling I know that walk of hers. The fresh rosy breeze has lifted her veil away. God Almighty — it is Deborah! O God — how pale she looks!... A young man walks behind her — a very young man, by my faith. O God! Patrick — he is your very image!... He is your shade made flesh. Along the stones of the road he is making a long sword ring. And now he is wrestling body to body with an oak — he, the slender little thing! O God! The oak is coming up by the roots, the oak is leaning, the oak is falling, the oak has crushed him!... Alas! Dead, the poor boy! A pomegranate tree in bloom — how beautiful a thing! But beneath that wild pomegranate — who is that woman, that woman of such beauty? Eve, or Venus? Such abandon in her pose! Such fire and such softness in her gaze! Such love upon her lips! Her bosom — how it beats and swells! Such grace in her every line! What pleasures wait to be plucked! Oh! To bring my lips to her foot alone would be death to me!... Am I in a dream? No — no, this is no madness of mine; it is not vanity that deludes me. She has seen me! She is smiling at me!

She is calling me!... An irresistible spell pulls me forward, hurls me towards her. Love is reborn for me. God bless my fortune! I am to die once more beneath a kiss. A mysterious spell draws me and sweeps me on, I tell you — I feel it well; I am overcome, I must give way. Come, Patrick — come and follow me; with freedom love is restored to us."

At those words, Fitz-Harris, who for one and twenty months had lain stretched upon his pallet, drew himself suddenly upright, and, crossing the vault in a few powerful strides, hurled himself against the wall. There, his fingers hooked into the joints of the masonry, he went on:

"Come, Patrick — come, my brother — do not forsake me in the midst of this joy. The wall is breached, I tell you — come, follow me; the ditches are full of heather — it is only a step. Come — follow me — come! We are going to be free!"

With these last words still upon his lips, he dropped to the ground with a dead weight, like a stone fallen from the vault; then a deep silence followed. Patrick then took that poor unhappy creature in his arms; the body was cold.

He was dead!…

[1] *Tobit*: the blind patriarch of the deuterocanonical Book of Tobit, whose sight was restored through the application of fish gall by his son Tobias acting under the guidance of the angel Raphael; Patrick's reference is to the blindness of Tobit rather than to his cure, invoking the image of a man robbed of sight by God's inscrutable design.

[2] *The garden of the Hesperides*: in Greek mythology, a garden at the western edge of the world where golden apples grew, guarded by the Hesperides and a serpent; fetching these apples was one of the twelve labours of Heracles. Fitz-Harris's wry point is that he would rather have a real apple on his own table than pursue mythological ones.

[3] *Jennet*: a small Spanish horse, typically of Andalusian breeding, prized in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for its smooth gait and elegant bearing; by the eighteenth century the word retained associations of fine horseflesh and Continental distinction.

[4] *Saint Eloi* (c. 588–660): patron saint of metalworkers, blacksmiths, and goldsmiths; a celebrated craftsman himself

before becoming Bishop of Noyon, he was the subject of the famous French song *La Bonne Roi Dagobert* and remained a byword for the finest work in metal.

[5] *Nielloed and damascened*: two techniques of decorative metalwork. Niello (*niellé*) involves inlaying a black sulphur compound into engraved metal to create contrasting patterns; damascening (*damasquiné*) involves inlaying gold or silver wire into a ground of steel or iron, originally associated with the craftsmen of Damascus.

[6] *Saint Hubert's Day*: the feast of Saint Hubert of Liège (3 November), patron saint of hunters; it was the traditional opening day of the hunting season at Chantilly and other great French estates, celebrated with elaborate ceremony.

[7] *Passementerie*: ornamental trimming of braid, fringe, tassels, or lace, applied to garments or furnishings; a mark of luxury and refinement in eighteenth-century dress.

[8] *Pale Ophelia:* the drowned heroine of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, whose death by water made her a touchstone of Romantic imagery for feminine beauty destroyed by circumstance; the allusion is characteristically Borelian in its anachronistic richness.

[9] *Lough Leane*: the largest of the Lakes of Killarney in County Kerry, sometimes called the Lower Lake; its Irish name means "lake of learning," associated with an early Christian monastery on the island of Innisfallen. It is the heart of the

landscape that runs through the novel from its earliest chapters.

[10] *MacGillycuddy's Reeks and Carrauntoohil:* the MacGillycuddy's Reeks are the highest mountain range in Ireland, situated in County Kerry; Carrauntoohil, at 1,038 metres, is Ireland's highest peak. Their appearance in Fitz-Harris's dying vision anchors his last sight of Ireland in the most specifically Irish landscape Borel could have chosen.

XVII.

Better the bitterest certainty than the slightest shadow of doubt, than the dimmest vagueness of unknowing; uncertainty devours where it lodges, and doubt digs deeper than grief; and it was in precisely such an abyss of uncertainty that Deborah dwelt, unable to learn what ultimate fate had befallen Patrick. With her own eyes she had watched the steel sink into his side; with her own ears she had caught his cries and that last, agonising *farewell*; his fall she had witnessed, and the carriage she had heard thundering away, taking with it, she had little doubt, both the dead man and those who had made him so; but by whose hand had he died, and at whose order, and what had become of his body? Of none of these things did she know anything. This uncertainty fed in her a fierce longing to go secretly back to France — to draw aside, if but by an inch, the curtain that hung over the truth, and to gather what remained of her dear friend and lay it to rest; as those fearless women of the

ancient world had done, who in the days of persecution would steal through the darkness to the sites of slaughter, and gather up the bodies of the martyrs to give them honourable burial.[1]

The moment those affairs of succession — ever the most long-winded of human entanglements — had at last been set in order, she placed the management of all her property in Sir John's care, and bade him farewell; not, though, without first heaping upon him new and generous proofs of her thankfulness. Icolm-Kill, for his part, remained true to the generous principle he had laid down from the first: he refused to set any value upon his services, he would accept no payment of any kind; he asked of Deborah one thing only, and he asked it as a kindness rather than a right: that he might attach himself to her cause and share in her destiny. Such a man as Icolm-Kill — able, knowing, ready to turn his hand to anything — was too uncommon and too readily useful to be overlooked by so shrewd a judge as the Countess Deborah; she was not the woman to let such an opportunity go begging when she might so easily make him an officer of her own house. She was prompt to oblige him, and settled upon him the charge of her son's education and the general intendance of her affairs.

In the harbour a French ship was fitting out for sea; and with a spirit bowed down by grief and a heart torn every way

at once, Deborah left Dublin behind her, left Ireland — that Ireland she loved so well — and stood away to sea at full sail; though not, as once it had been, to hasten to a reunion with her beautiful Patrick at the Continental rendezvous of their choosing. She went forth, that pious soul, bearing an urn in her hand...

Wishing to place herself as far as possible from the wrath of the Court and the Police, should word of her escape from Sainte-Marguerite have leaked out, Deborah disguised herself under the Irish name of Barrymore; as for Icolm-Kill, who had gone about the Fortress in the character of a supposed Lord Cunnyngham, he need do nothing more than remove his mask to become a perfectly different man. Not without a shudder did our unhappy young heroine turn again towards Paris; but she drew on her courage, put her lips to that cup brimming with bitterness, and drained it steadily to the dregs — for there lives in sorrow a mysterious and voluptuous quality that the stricken soul craves with a singular hunger; suffering, no less than joy, has its own intoxicating taste. With equal disturbance of spirit she found herself again in the Rue de Verneuil — that street of so serene and so distinguished an air — where she and Patrick had dwelt in their seclusion and known, for a little while, a happiness one does not easily come by. She crossed that pavement shaking at every step; those very stones seemed to her still soaked in her friend's

blood. Then it all unrolled before her — that fatal night, like some dark arras hung before her eyes — and she heard, with perfect and appalling clarity, the very clang of steel upon steel. Since she had last seen it, the Hôtel Saint-Papoul had been so disfigured on its outer face that Deborah spent a considerable time in doubt as to whether she recognised it, and still more time in gathering the courage to go in. Both master and function had changed in that house; and the concierge who now kept the door told her with perfect assurance that Monsieur Goudouly, having disposed of everything he owned in Paris, had long since removed himself to his native Béarn, this having occurred some years back already. So that was why — it made sense enough now — every letter Patrick had dispatched to that good and faithful old man during the closing period of Monsieur de Guyonnet's lieutenancy had passed without a word in return, to his bitter and lasting grief. It was not an auspicious beginning; the omen was a sufficiently disagreeable one; the alarm it roused in Deborah was keener than she could easily govern. Her hopes had rested largely upon Monsieur Goudouly for any word of Patrick's fate — not, perhaps, something wholly conclusive, but at the very least some thread she might follow, some direction to light her painful search. No less painful was the loss of those belongings that had been left behind in her apartment at the time of her abduction — left at her host's disposal, though that loyal soul had, as we have had occasion

to remark, gathered them carefully into a valise and sent on promptly to the Keep; they were gone now, and the knowledge grieved her deeply. Dresses and jewels she thought little of; it was not in her nature to spend grief on such things; what she mourned, and mourned with a bitterness that time would not dull, were a few letters from Patrick's hand, certain verses he had turned for her when youth still ran warm in him; trivial love-tokens he had offered with a young man's ceremony; some small tokens she had given him in return; and some well-loved books — his, or hers, or belonging to both — fine enough in their own right, but made finer still by the memories that breathed from their pages, and precious beyond all reckoning for the little sprigs, the rose-leaves, the dried violets pressed between each leaf as in a gardener's collection. Yet above all of these, beyond all else, it was Patrick's sword that she could least bear to have lost — the sword he had drunk deep in the blood of his assassins, found afterwards lying at the gate of the hôtel. To have seen it one day at the side of Vengeance grown to his full stature, to have seen it gleam and sparkle in the hand of Vengeance come to manhood — what a glory that would have been to her!

The want of Monsieur Goudouly left Deborah in a bewilderment she could not see past; and what remedy was there for that anxious suspense of which her whole soul had grown so desperately tired? Where ought she to sink her pick

to find the thread of ore that might conduct her to the main seam? Which door, out of so many, was she to knock upon? It had been a crime committed in darkness, the work of hired hands serving masters who wanted for no authority; and such masters would have left nothing undone to make every trace of the affair vanish — not one stain of blood on the dust of that lonely byway leading to the pit where Patrick's body had in all likelihood been cast.

On the bare chance of an answer worth having, Icolm-Kill wrote with all due humility to the Lieutenant-General of Police, asking whether he had received any intelligence of an act of violence carried out on the second day of September 1763 against a young Irishman answering to the name of Patrick Whyte or Fitz-Whyte, then serving in the first company of the King's Musketeers; and if such a matter were not wholly unknown to him, whether it might be within his power to assist in the recovery of the young man's remains, which his family earnestly desired to have exhumed and brought back to the land of his forefathers. The Lieutenant-General of Police of the Kingdom returned an answer to this petition — or rather directed his clerks to return one — that no account of any such incident had come to his attention, and that it was with the most sincere regret, the canting rogue! that he found himself powerless to afford any comfort to a family in whose affliction he professed to take so sincere and

personal a share. The answer surprised Deborah not at all; she had looked for this, or something of the kind; it was what plain reason had all along suggested: when did wolves ever make a meal of their fellows?

Icolm-Kill was not a man to be put off; undismayed and unyielding, he took it upon himself to try yet again. He called on Monsieur de Villepastour with perfect boldness, passing himself off as an uncle of Patrick's who had but recently landed, and had been charged by an anxious family to leave no stone unturned in discovering what had become of him. Monsieur le Marquis bit most obligingly — hook, line, and all. Making a fine show of magnanimity, he declared that Patrick had been a most winning young man, for whom he had felt a very real affection; as to what had become of him, however, he was completely in the dark; ever since that unhappy moment when he had been under the disagreeable necessity of removing him from the company — the Gentleman-Guards of His Majesty, that is — he had heard not a word about him, any more than about the young Irishwoman who had followed him to France. Monsieur de Gave, Marquis de Villepastour, was lying. The Marquis knew a great deal more than he was endeavouring to appear to know — very much more: those who have followed this tragedy step by step will have no difficulty in perceiving that; Icolm-Kill perceived it rather less clearly, yet he was by no means content. Nothing

would have pleased him better than to box the rascal's ears; but he had set himself to probe the man to his very depths, and so he kept his guard deliberately down and went on with every appearance of open-hearted simplicity:

"This young Irishwoman, I have been given to understand, is confined somewhere in a state prison, for reasons no one has seen fit to disclose; and where Patrick is concerned, there is a vague sort of story making the rounds, from no very clear source, which would have it that he was murdered one evening as he quitted his lodgings."

"Murdered!" repeated Monsieur de Villepastour. "No — that I do not believe. I lay no claim to any special knowledge of the business; it is nothing more than a feeling I have. But murdered, you say — and who, may I ask, is supposed to have done it?"

"Low hired bravoes, set on by persons of considerable rank whom he had had the ill luck to cross; they are believed to have been behind it, Monsieur le Marquis."

"I confess, my dear sir, the story does not seem to me very probable; but however that may be, your best course in your position would be to apply to the Lieutenant-General of Police. The matter is squarely within his province, and he could give you satisfaction without the least difficulty. You

may safely presume that the Lieutenant-General is fully and perfectly acquainted with your nephew's fate: pay him a visit."

Rather than present himself before the Lieutenant-General of Police in person, Icolm-Kill contrived to place a second letter in his hands — measured and civil in form, yet urgent, pleading, and for those not wholly without feeling, deeply moving; the reply to which was as follows: "Sir, the letter with which I did myself the honour to favour you ought to have been sufficient to confine you to your first request; you should have understood that to press the matter further could serve no purpose but to make it worse. Be the fate of your nephew known to me or not, I have communicated to you precisely what it was incumbent on me to communicate. It will perhaps not be superfluous to remind you that my duty is to carry out the King's will, not to make public the exercise of his sovereign power."

That these two men held the secret she was searching for, and held it in a closed fist, was perfectly evident to Deborah; yet knowing full well what those two hearts — devoid alike of pity and of remorse — were truly made of, she understood that she must go no further. This is not to say that she had given up all hope of learning the truth one day — sooner or later; only she had come to expect more from the slow efficacy of time, from accident, or from Providence than from her own unaided efforts. When she quitted Ireland it

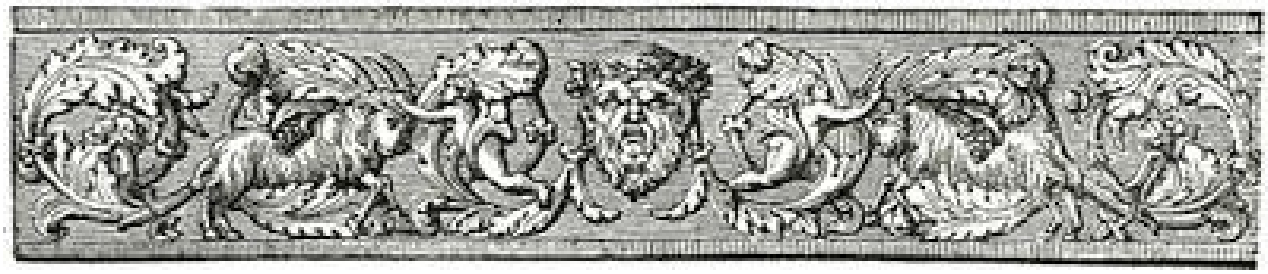
had been her intention to make France her home; the ignorance in which she remained as to what had become of Patrick only fixed her more firmly in that purpose; but she was eager beyond measure to get out of Paris, toward which she felt a wholly undisguised and deeply rooted rancour. Paris was a torment to her. The city pressed down on her with all its immensity; she felt as though the only air to be had there was the tainted air of greed and malice. There was not a face to be seen that did not appear to her the very emblem of venality, of meanness, and of cowardice. Yet she could not remove herself too great a distance: she needed to remain within range of catching the smallest piece of public gossip, the slenderest breath of intelligence that might put her on the track of something.

Having combed the whole of that rich and varied country round Paris — that vast, well-fed, well-furnished region, thick with the cast-off trappings of prosperity, that great press of human beings and cut stone; after exploring the most out-of-the-way corners of that same country in the hope of discovering some handsome, solitary, and little-known retreat, and inspecting every manor-house, every small holding, every dwelling of any slight seigneurial character that was unoccupied, abandoned, or willing to change hands at the gleam of a gold coin, she chanced upon a very handsome little château, formerly the property of a magnificent tax-

farmer whose fortunes had recently collapsed, perched most happily and picturesquely on the brow of a hill that bent over its own reflection in a winding reach of the Seine between Triel and Évêquemont.[2] The setting, the stateliness, and the seclusion of the place were more than enough to captivate her; she did not hesitate to make what was no small purchase, and retired there with a lightened heart, to dwell in her grief and her love for her son, and to give herself entirely to the rearing of Vengeance.

[1] *The women who gathered the martyrs*: an allusion to the early Christian practice, recorded in hagiographical tradition, of devout women recovering the bodies of martyrs executed under Roman persecution — among the most celebrated being those who attended to the body of Christ himself, and later figures such as Saint Praxedes and Saint Pudentiana, who were said to have gathered the blood and remains of martyred Christians in Rome.

[2] *Triel and Évêquemont*: two villages on the Seine some thirty kilometres west of Paris, in the Yvelines; the river makes a series of distinctive loops through this section of the valley, offering exactly the picturesque seclusion Borel describes.



XVIII.

Sad is the work before me; but having committed myself to the narration of these unhappy events, I shall carry it to its end. I had flattered myself that my spirit was stronger, my heart more callous or more detached; I had supposed I could lay hands on these misfortunes and chisel out their long bas-relief with the untroubled calm of a mason dressing a tombstone; how far I was from the truth of it! The further I advance into this valley of tears, the more my footfall raises a swirling melancholy that fastens itself to my soul as the dust fastens to the mantle of a man long on the road. Every act of violence I have laid before you has lit a true flame of anger in my breast; every suffering I have portrayed has been paid for in tears. Take heart, O my Muse! yet a few pages more, and all those beautiful griefs which you have gathered with so pious and painstaking a hand, griefs hitherto unknown to the world,

smothered, lost, like humble weeds crushed beneath the sheaves of glittering and numberless deeds that lie scattered over the field of history, will have found their resolution at last, and put on a form that shall not suffer them ever to die — to die in the remembrance of the living.

At the sight of Fitz-Harris lying lifeless before him, Patrick was struck to nothing. So deep within him did his grief do its work, so entirely inward, that nothing of it made itself visible. A great while passed in which he gave no manifestation of any sort. He stood there, that was all — motionless, voiceless. That stroke had transfixed him, going through and through. Like the nail of Sisera,[1] grief had him nailed to the ground. They were two dead men together: one entirely cold already, the other growing so by degrees; one stiffened by despair, the other by death.

When the turnkey arrived in his customary fashion to deliver the prisoners their ration of bread, the sound of the trap-door being opened restored Patrick suddenly to the world of the living. He dragged himself upright and, in a voice fit to break the heart, cast these words up towards the arched ceiling:

"My brother is dead!…"

By compelling Patrick to shatter the noble silence his grief had kept, that sudden intrusion opened a release for all

that had been pressing on him: great sighs heaved themselves out of his labouring chest; his eyes had been dry until then, and now suddenly he could not stop his tears.

"O my brother!" he cried. "Why did you leave me? After so long a life shared so closely, were we not to have died together? Why leave me here alone in this abyss? Did I not love you well enough — was my tenderness for you so wanting?…

"But what am I saying? No — you did well to die, O my brother! Death has made an end of all your suffering. A man may be wrong to have been born; he is never wrong to die. To be born for this, to arrive at this after the long business of being born — for what?... For most of us, what is life but a long chain, a long accumulation of griefs, strung between two impenetrable riddles: the riddle of being born and the riddle of dying?

"Truly you did well to die, well to let yourself be unmade, O my brother! Suppose you had been set free, restored to the world, and lived a few more hours on this earth — what more would you have found there? Had you not already drained every one of the less bitter gifts that human life has to offer? You had your cradle, and a mother's zealous care above it; you had lived through childhood, which enjoys the world without a shadow of care; you had known a first love; you had your twentieth year. All that was left for you to discover was mere

tinsel and trash; all that was left for you to suffer through was the slow wearing-out of age. Right it was that you should die, O my brother!

"Yet I am the elder of us two, and it was I who should have led the way into death. Why, of the two of us, has death chosen to spare me?... Do not begrudge me that reprieve, my brother! God has, surely, some hidden design upon me which He could not have worked through you. Death was yours to take — you had no ties; there is nothing you leave in the world; but I have, lost somewhere in this great world, a woman who calls my name and has need of me, and a son, surely, who needs me to stand by his mother's side; and God — who shall say? — may perhaps be minded to send me back to them, who have such need of me, and to give them back to me, who am in such desperate need of them. If such be your purpose, O God, then blessed is it! You know with what completeness I have resigned myself! Your will for me, whatever it may be — let it be done. I bow to the ground before you.... But should it be that I am never to see them again, and that I am to die in this pit as my brother has died, I ask of you one grace and one alone, O my God: grant me, as you granted my brother in his last hour, illusions past all describing; send death to find me in the middle of a delirium."

In the grip of anguish as cruel as any he had ever known, Patrick waited from minute to minute for some gravedigger to appear and take his friend away; but no one came; and much as he dreaded that supreme moment of parting, when his companion would be removed without pity and without return, plunging him into a cheerless and absolute solitude, he none the less summoned it with every prayer he could offer. Nature is pitiless in her laws of destruction and decay, as unsparing of the most beautiful life as of the most beloved; and Fitz-Harris had died in so ruined a state, and the pit was so pestilential, that Patrick no longer dared — or, to speak more truly, no longer could — embrace him, could no longer lay his lips upon his forehead.

When at last the trap-door rose — after the usual interval between the gaoler's visits — Patrick went straight to stand beneath the opening and cried up with indignation:

"Did I not tell you that my brother is dead? What is the King's Lieutenant thinking of? Pray remind him that even here men are owed certain last offices."

But once again the turnkey took himself off without so much as dropping a word in reply.

Engulfed in thoughts of the darkest bitterness, his spirit crushed beneath the grinding wheel of reflection, his body sagging under the weight of a long watch — he had not once

closed his weeping eyes since God had taken Fitz-Harris from him — Patrick finally succumbed to sleep. Borne on the wing of a waking dream, sleep stole up on him so softly that he was powerless to hold it off. Deep within every melancholy there will always be found a few drachms of opium.

He was still deep in this sleep when a man from the Keep, leaning through the opening of the vault and feeding a ladder down into it, directed Patrick to carry his friend's body up. Dazzled by the light pouring into the vault and surprised by so abrupt a visitation, Patrick nonetheless rose at once, and excused himself from the order on the ground of his extreme feebleness. But the order was repeated in an even harsher tone, and someone chimed in with a mocking air: "Though naturally, if monsieur would rather not be parted from his cadaver, no one is obliged to consult any taste but his own."

Patrick, moved not by any desire to obey such insolence, but by what he owed to his friend's shade, summoned every remaining ounce of his strength, shouldered the body of Fitz-Harris with all the courage he possessed, and began to make his way up — to crawl up, I ought rather to say — rung by rung. Bent double under the weight, one hand free and the other braced against the body to keep it in position, he came more than once within an ace of being thrown backwards in a terrible fall. Most cruel of all was the fact that he had no shoes of any kind; at every rung his bare soles were sawn

across by the wood, causing him anguish that was almost too great to be borne. When he had gained the upper vault, he made out at some distance the turnkeys and the King's Lieutenant, all four of them stationed well back, doubtless to avoid the noxious air rising from the extraction pit. The three underlings each bore a lantern. The Lieutenant carried nothing; he had merely clapped a nightcap on his head and wound himself up in the sprawling foliage of a dressing-gown as spacious as it was laughable.

Giving him no time to recover so much as a breath of courage, these four sorry creatures closed ranks around him and swept Patrick along in their midst, bent double as he was under his holy load.

Up several winding staircases they went, through vault after vault, hall after hall, passage after passage and gallery after gallery, until at last they entered a garden — the Keep's own garden. Hard by the wall, a hole of some depth had been cut in the earth. The moment Patrick was brought to it, he grasped its purpose without a word being spoken, and laid his burden down along its edge. Such had been the strain of carrying that crushing weight through the long and tortuous darkness that cold sweat fell in heavy drops from his brow and his legs threatened to give way entirely. Was there a more mournful spectacle to be conceived anywhere, a scene better fitted to turn the blood to ice? Everywhere great black walls

enclosing their cargo of darkness and silence; sinister-looking men with faces sunk in shadow; a hateful figure in a long robe suggestive of a man of the courts; three lanterns shedding a few muffled and feeble gleams that served only to light the thin foliage of a handful of trees from beneath; a hole dug in the earth; and a corpse that did not move, carried by a corpse that did — this last one matted with hair and wrapped in rags.

Having put their lanterns down by the wall and each armed himself with a spade, the three turnkeys pushed the body of Fitz-Harris down into the pit, and had already thrown several shovelfulls of earth upon him, when the sight of it called some remnant of strength back into Patrick; he raised himself and, with a gesture that brooked no argument, commanded them to stop. Then, stepping slowly towards the King's Lieutenant, who looked on with his hands behind his back and his nightcap on his head:

"In God's name, sir," he said, with the quiet dignity that never forsook him, not even in the least of his expressions, "this is not how men are laid in the earth! Hatred, however fierce, will usually check itself where nothingness begins; yours, it seems, which exceeds every bound, exceeds even the threshold of the tomb. It was not enough, then, sir — was it? — to have basely had my brother murdered, and to have let him die without the aid of a physician or a priest?… Take him to the chapel, and bring a chaplain to him!..."

This blunt challenge was met by the Chevalier de Rougemont with characteristic treachery: there were, he said, no priests at the Keep for the use of those who held to the Reformed faith; but upon Patrick's humbly pointing out that they were Irish and Catholic:

"That is quite enough, young man," he retorted with unblushing insolence. "I am accountable for my conduct to His Majesty, and to His Majesty only."

The Chevalier was under no illusion whatever as to his prisoners' nationality or faith; the reason he had put forward was nothing but a convenience, masking the true one which he had no wish to bring into the open. Monsieur le Chevalier was in debt to all and sundry — inside the Keep and out, tradespeople, butcher, turnkeys, kitchen-boys alike — owed likewise to the curé of the Sainte-Chapelle the fees for a number of burials he had not seen fit to pay for; and the curé, having found it impossible to prise a single sou out of the scoundrel, had at last been driven to extremity and had taken the matter to court. This was why — and Patrick was never to know it — Fitz-Harris was put in the ground without priest or funeral rites, like a dog.

Words are not equal to this; language has neither the resource nor the flexibility the occasion demands; I cannot say what I would say, cannot find the sign I would use, to paint the deep and stunned bewilderment into which Patrick

fell when those insulting obsequies were done and he found himself once more alone in the pit. If the loss of a beloved soul, amidst all the bustle and clamour and occupation of the world, strikes us a terrible blow and leaves beside us a void that nothing can fill, what void must not surround the captive when he loses the one companion of his soul — the one soul that shared the cold of his abyss — and with what deadly horror must that void not close about him. Had not the thought of Deborah, and the sustaining power of a far-off hope, been there to hold him up, he would assuredly have sunk beneath his grief; and indeed it is doubtful whether even the thought of Deborah could have defended what was mortal in him against death itself, had he been left much longer in that dungeon.

Some hours later however — ten or twelve, I believe — a voice entirely unknown to him came suddenly to his ear. The vault above had opened without his being aware of it, so wholly was he sunk in himself, and the voice said:

"What! Down in this hole, in the depths of this darkness, there is a living soul — a creature of God? What a wretched, cowardly abomination!… I do not know what offence this man at the bottom of that pit may have committed; but this I know very well, Monsieur le Lieutenant: one must not turn criminal in one's dealings with the criminal; one must not answer crime with a punishment worse than the crime, and

above all not with one that is without end, without purpose, and which neither law, nor King, nor my King — who is your King also, Monsieur le Lieutenant — has ever asked for."

Such plain and severe reflections as these gave the Chevalier de Rougemont something of a rebuff, and Monsieur le Chevalier — hampered, no doubt, by his own confusion — did not open his mouth. But the same voice, after a moment's silence, having ordered a ladder to be placed and called for torches to light the way, Monsieur le Lieutenant — alarmed no doubt lest his prisoner, if discovered, should denounce him — suddenly found his habitual eloquence again and began to speak with an air of perfect openness. The Pharisee!

"For the love of heaven, my lord, I beg you on my knees — do not go down into that cell; the creature who inhabits it is a madman in a frenzy, savage and wholly unapproachable; he would be the death of you; this man has his terrible fits."

Without appearing to take any notice of this perfidious insinuation, the same stranger replied:

"Good, good, sir — torches; let me have some light! I shall see for myself. Never let us forget, sir, that the lunatic and the evil-doer are, above all things, wretched human beings worthy of our solicitude; we owe to one our care, to the other our compassion. God brings into the world men, and men

only; it is the world, sir, that turns them wicked or mad. The wicked and the mad are the world's creation — they are our creation, Monsieur le Lieutenant."

The stranger came down the ladder and planted both feet on the black encrusted floor; he cast his eyes over the grey and glistening crust of the walls and the vault, looked around him, then let his gaze descend and rest, for a long while, upon Patrick, that ghost of a man with his savage hair and beard, his wasted muscles ill-concealed beneath the last shreds of his rags, motionless in the most utter and cheerless stillness; and, after a visible struggle to compose a heart that was splitting open at such a spectacle, at so much suffering and misery and degradation, he found sufficient calm at last to speak, in a tone of such warm encouragement that it would have won round the most fearful of wild things:

"Do not be afraid, prisoner; I am not come to hurt you; I am come to offer what consolation I can, and to remove you from the horror of this place."

At so marked a gesture of goodwill, Patrick rose and inclined himself respectfully. The charitable stranger was clad entirely in black; a sword of bright steel glinted at his hip. There was a gentleness and nobility in his face, and grace about his mouth; his handsome and unclouded brow revealed a heart untouched by base matter or remorse. The pellucid

quality of his look proclaimed an equally pellucid soul. Patrick was still regarding him with wondering eyes when he went on:

"Your misfortune is very great, sir, and goes to my heart; it must surely outweigh your fault many times over?"

"My misfortunes are, indeed, such as one rarely hears of, sir," Patrick answered sadly, "but I am blameless before God, before the law, and before my own conscience. To have found favour with an adulteress, and then to have lost it — that is my offence; the very offence of Joseph, and one that, like his, has brought me to a prison where I am left to die."[2]

"Do not abandon yourself to despair, sir; the only man truly condemned is he whom God condemns. It is often God's pleasure to bring his servant low, the better to exalt him afterwards. Joseph walked out of his prison to reign over Egypt. How long have you been kept here?"

"It was the second of September 1763 that I was brought to this Keep; and since September — or it may have been December — of 1773, I have lived in this pit."

"What! Twenty-one months in this abyss — twenty-one months! O my poor young man! God must truly be keeping you for some great purpose; it can only be His hand that has held you upright under so crushing a weight of misery."

"I have not succumbed, it is true; but I had a friend, sir — a brother — a companion in misfortune and in captivity,

who, worn to exhaustion and done to death by despair, gave up his soul beneath this very vault. A few hours ago his body was still lying there. Oh, if only you had come down into this pit earlier! He was a brave young man and a good one. The earth's loss is heaven's gain. O Fitz-Harris! O my friend! All was cruel where you were concerned — your life, your death, your destiny!…"

The stranger, moved to the very bottom of his soul, took Patrick's hand in that moment and pressed it with warmth. Patrick, in no less a depth of feeling, went to his knees and spoke:

"What is in your heart speaks for itself; your eyes are bright with tears. I do not know who you are, sir; but I can see with perfect clarity that you are an upright man; permit me to bow myself at your feet."

"No — stand up, my good friend," the stranger told him, "and follow me. Let us be out of this poisoned air as soon as may be; come — you are to be free; come — I am the key that turns in the lock of liberty."

"You are, sir — I can see it, I tell you," Patrick continued, his emotion swelling with every word, "a messenger from heaven, sent by God; and what you see fit to give me back I accept with a glad heart — not for myself, but for the sake of a woman who is the object of all the worship and all the love

I have to give; but the liberty I lost in the company of a friend, and which I shall recover alone, will always be a dark and mournful thing to me."

When the stranger had made his way back out of the pit with Patrick following, he took him by the hand and turned to Monsieur de Rougemont:

"Monsieur le Lieutenant, I present to you a young man whose friend it would do me honour to be — a man of sound reason and admirable self-command, whose dignity I find truly edifying. It was badly done, Monsieur le Lieutenant, to have tried to put a deception upon me. You are, Monsieur le Lieutenant, a cruel officer; that is a great pity for yourself — you will never be looked upon as a kinsman by our young King. Have this gentleman taken to a room in the Keep at once, if you please, and let the most careful attentions be given him without a moment's delay."

Even as he finished speaking, the stranger was making his way off with a swift and modest step, placing himself beyond the reach of the touching expressions of gratitude that Patrick sought to press upon him.

But who was this stranger whose voice was at once gentle and powerful, whom so many seemed to surround with so much reverence? He was.... Well then — yes! This man whose hand set itself to removing so many chains — terrible,

terrible fate! — let the years go by, and he himself shall in his turn be loaded with chains that no one will remove. Let the time come, and the head that will then be white shall roll upon the scaffold! This man — let us bow our heads; vice, selfishness, indifference, creep back into your shame! — this man was virtue incarnate; he was Chrétien-Guillaume Lamoignon de Malesherbes, Minister of Paris, and in the fullness of time, last counsel to Louis XVI.[3]

They had taken Patrick to the octagonal room, the room where so many years of suffering with Fitz-Harris had been endured; and he sat there in quiet sadness, trying to draw some warmth from a great blazing fire, when Monsieur d'Albert, the new Lieutenant-General of Police, came in with marked affability and said:

"Monsieur de Malesherbes would not have it, sir, that he should leave the Keep without sending you, by my mouth, a parting word of encouragement. Have no anxiety — it will not be long before you are free. The Minister, counting upon your deference to his wishes, hopes that you will be pleased to send him before long a full and particular account of your captivity and the causes that brought it about. He further requests that you will be good enough to attach to this account a list of whatever sum of money and articles you consider necessary in order to present yourself again in the

world as befits your station: the Minister will take true pleasure in making provision for whatever you name."

With a graceful bow to express his gratitude, Patrick answered, having appeared to reflect for an instant:

"The account that the Minister deigns to request of me — though to go down again in thought and stir the great mass of my misfortunes will break my heart — I shall write it according to his wish. But suffer me, sir, to spare myself the list; I am in need of nothing. Liberty is all I ask."

He appeared once more to collect himself for some moments; then he resumed:

"Yet, sir, so much goodness encourages me to take a liberty; I shall dare to implore humbly of Monsieur de Malesherbes one thing which, during all my affliction, has been a sore want to me, the sight of which will sustain me through the last hours I have yet to spend in this dungeon, and which, in memory of him, I shall always keep as something sacred — a crucifix."

[1] *The nail of Sisera*: in the Book of Judges (4–5), the Canaanite general Sisera, fleeing defeat, is killed by Jael, who drives a tent-peg through his temple as he sleeps; he is thereafter described as lying at her feet, bowed, fallen, where he bowed, there he fell. Borel's image inverts the biblical original: Patrick is not slain but transfixed in grief, pinned to the ground as though by that same iron nail.

[2] *The offence of Joseph*: in Genesis 39, Joseph is imprisoned by Potiphar after his wife falsely accuses him of attempting to violate her when he has in fact resisted her advances; he is cast into prison, as the biblical archetype underlying the entire novel. The novel's title, *Madame Putiphar*, makes the identification explicit from the outset, and Patrick here voices it directly for the first and only time.

[3] Chrétien-Guillaume Lamoignon de Malesherbes (1721–1794): First President of the Cour des Aides and Minister of the Royal Household under Louis XVI, celebrated for his defence of civil liberties, his efforts on behalf of imprisoned writers (including Diderot), and his courageous insistence on reforming the arbitrary system of state detention. When Louis XVI was brought to trial in 1792, Malesherbes —

already in his seventies — voluntarily undertook his defence, knowing it would likely cost him his life. He was guillotined in April 1794, at the age of seventy-two.

BOOK THE SEVENTH.

XIX.

The manor of Deborah, sheltered behind by a wood and embraced on either hand by two others, crowned the brow of a precipitous hill like a ring of battlements, and gazed, as though enamoured of itself, into a meandering loop of the Seine below — as I believe, if I recollect rightly, I have already had occasion to observe. Before the house stretched a wide moat, which doubled back upon itself at each extremity in the manner of a Greek fret, reaching round on one side to embrace the keepers' lodge, and on the other to take in the stables and kennels. A stone footbridge spanned the moat before a grand gate, forged by the hammer into elaborate shapes; the two iron leaves of this gate, broad and membranous as the wings that bear the Devil aloft, were anchored deep in the flanks of a pair of colossal

brick pillars, which displayed upon their flat summits fearful carved boars — their jaws stretched wide, their eyes half out of the head, their rough hides all a-bristle. A long, open sandy walk, flanked by parterres[1] laid out in the formal manner, drew one onward to the lordly dwelling; and the great front steps, spread gracefully before the door with their dressed stone landing and their flower-crowned urns on every tier, seemed to address the approaching stranger in the warmest and most inviting of accents: *Come up, come in; welcome, welcome — be our guest.* Yet the benevolence of those steps was not to be had without a price; the stranger had, before he could reach them, to prove his mettle in no very gentle fashion, and a faint-hearted man, it must be said, would have turned back long before. For the length of that sandy walk, trim little kennel-boxes had been placed at ten-pace intervals along both borders, and from each of these, roused by the lightest step upon the gravel, a chained dog of prodigious size and ferocity would burst forth with a fury that left the trembling visitor barely room to pass between rows of sharp teeth and a din of barking that would have unnerved the bravest man alive.

So isolated was this dwelling, so utterly retired, so perfectly encircled by the deepest solitude, and yet in so admirable a state of repair and so happily contrived in all its arrangements, that it answered Deborah's long-cherished vision of it as though built to her design; when at last she

took it for her own, there was not a syllable of it she saw fit to disturb. In one respect only had she left her mark upon the place. True to her sorrow and to the hope she would not relinquish, she had spared no expense in raising, over a vault dug beneath the ground, a splendid white marble sarcophagus to the memory of Patrick — this, beneath the shelter of a great resinous tree whose broad horizontal branches opened like a parasol above the centre of the wide lawn, which, islanded on every side by the surrounding woods, laid its carpet of deep green velvet at the foot of the inner façade. There the tomb stood in readiness, built to receive his earthly remains, should Heaven, as she prayed with every breath, at last allow her to recover them. There it knelt, that sepulchre, like a penitent prostrated for ever beneath a weight of remorse too heavy to be borne, its heraldic shield veiled, its inscription-panel silent, its marble form motionless and unmoved and unchanging in the midst of nature's endless, graceful, ever-shifting renewals; and the effect thus produced was one of the most imposing that art can achieve. From it there breathed a pervasive fragrance of deep sorrow, which spread itself over all the solitude round about, making that one fixed and unwavering thought — the thought that dwelt for ever in Deborah's grave and serious soul — seem to hang in the very air, watching and wakeful, over those quiet grounds.

When she had not long been settled in her retreat, our sombre mistress of the manor had despatched Icolm-Kill northward to her Limerick stronghold, with instructions to remove the precious paintings her grandfather had so devoutly left her and to convey them across into France, together with her Italian library — a library of which mention was made in the earlier chapters of this melancholy tale, at what exact moment I find I can no longer say with confidence. His absence she had put to good use: from Paris she had brought a small party of artists and craftsmen, whom she had employed upon mysterious labours in a chamber lying at the very end of her suite of rooms, close against her own bedchamber, secured as a strong-box is secured, into which not a soul in the world but herself ever passed, and into which, faithful to the requirements of this narrative, we shall not pass yet awhile.

For some years already Deborah had lived a quiet, solitary existence in that eagle's nest of hers, poised high against the sky and shrouded in the deep mystery of the encircling woods. There was still warmth enough in her heart, still enough of affection and enthusiasm unsapped by grief, for her to have become passionately sensible of the spell that those grounds cast — so full were they of charm and of a kind of sovereign authority over the soul. The rough and open country around her, that most discreet and generous

and caressing of companions, steeped all it touched in fragrance and in dew; and the fragrance and dew found their way, in time, into the bitterness of her grief and the open wound that would not close. Nor shall I deny it: somewhere in the depths of her melancholy, for all its darkness and opacity, a ray of happiness struggled to make itself felt — a pale and timorous flicker, it is true, but one at whose fire her chilled and benumbed soul was able, in some small measure, to warm itself.

Rarely did Deborah carry her steps beyond the limits of her own domain; and even within those limits, her feet sought out more willingly the tangled ivy-webs of the shaded grove than the open meadow, where the flowers she might have trodden lay pledged already to the scythe. Should necessity or some piece of indispensable business summon her to town — whether to Meulan, to Saint-Germain, or to Paris itself — she would go, cocooned in the depths of her carriage, and shrouded in a thick veil against the curiosity of any eye that might chance her way. Not that she stood in any great terror of the police, with their grudging, oblique vigilance; her precautions arose rather from a settled contempt and loathing for the world she had turned her back upon — a world she liked to avoid as one avoids a venomous creature, with a wide berth and a cold eye. Her servants and her own household alone were suffered to come near her; no visitor was ever

received at the château. That extraordinary tranquillity, in the midst of which a young woman had folded herself away — unknown, of foreign birth, contemptuous of all the world goes after, endowed with a beauty as singular as the rule of life she had imposed upon herself, richly gifted by both nature and fortune, designed by every quality she possessed to set the world talking, yet choosing instead to spread nothing but silence — that extraordinary tranquillity had not, it will readily be believed, failed to provoke a general tide of curiosity, wonder, and admiration; and in some few hearts, something more culpable than admiration. All had tried, each after his own fashion and to the measure of his ingenuity, to break through the obscuring mist, to force apart the thick, unyielding hedge, and steal a look at what lay behind it. The most outlandish theories and the most reckless of conjectures were launched abroad, and each was tasted and relished with considerable pleasure. Long had every brilliant young gentleman of the neighbouring lordships made it his point of honour to force some sort of entry into the presence of the mysterious Countess of Barrymore; but though they had between them manufactured many an incident of the most theatrical and romantic cast, not one had ever managed to get so far as the ha-ha[2] at her gate.

Deborah, faithful to the memory of Patrick's shade, was never seen but in mourning, and the peasantry had christened

her accordingly — the black goddess, they called her, though they preferred, on the whole, the good black lady. Men of the fields are not much disposed to compliment; when they called her good, she had warranted every syllable of it. And rightly so: her goodness was as a great tree, laden and bowing with its fruit, beneath whose branches every cottage in the surrounding country found shelter. Like a loaf passed round the table, her goodness was apportioned to each in turn, and seemed — as bread will — to increase rather than diminish under the knife that served each waiting share. With quiet skill she knew how to unlock the secret of each person's distress; and even as she remained faithful to her solitude, her charity set out on her behalf, its hands brimming, from one threshold to the next. Now it was at a sick man's bedside; now it was rekindling an oven that poverty had let go cold; now it was setting the ploughman's team to his plough again — the ploughman who had been weeping in his furrow over his dead cattle — or re-tempering the woodcutter's notched axe and restoring the failing arms of the man himself, both of them the worse for long service among the oaks.

Where the administration of the château was concerned, together with its estates and its woodlands, Deborah placed herself wholly in Icolm-Kill's hands. Her anxious care she kept for a holier and more fitting purpose — for her son, for Vengeance, upon whom she lavished without pause the never-

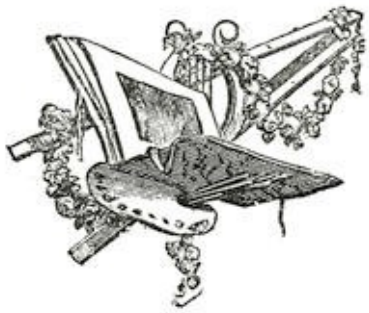
emptying cup of her attentions, and for whom she would have willingly stripped bare every hour that was hers to give.

Behind the nearest thickets of the park lay a spring, rising out of bare rock and flowing on beneath a spreading brake of watercress. There was about the place an air of deep repose and gentle beauty. It was here that Deborah liked to come and seat herself in her hours of leisure. Vengeance tumbled about in the tall grass around her; she read, or let herself go, without resistance, into the aimless drift of a reverie. Each day, too, without ever once omitting it, she would be absent for quite lengthy stretches; she would vanish into the far end of her apartments, into that secret room we are not permitted to enter. And not infrequently she would remain there through part of the evening, and even into the night.

The scion was becoming, day by day, the true and faithful image of the felled tree. The boyish good looks of Vengeance were growing daily more reminiscent of Patrick's manly beauty, and seemed to promise that they would one day equal it. In point of character, he seemed to have been cast in a singularly happy mould: his father's generosity and solidity of nature fused with Deborah's resolution, boldness, and instinctive readiness of spirit. Brought up in the fullest freedom, abandoned to all the impetuosity of his nature — no chain, no collar, no bridle, no yoke laid upon him, no duty imposed, no study required, nothing to oppress or check him

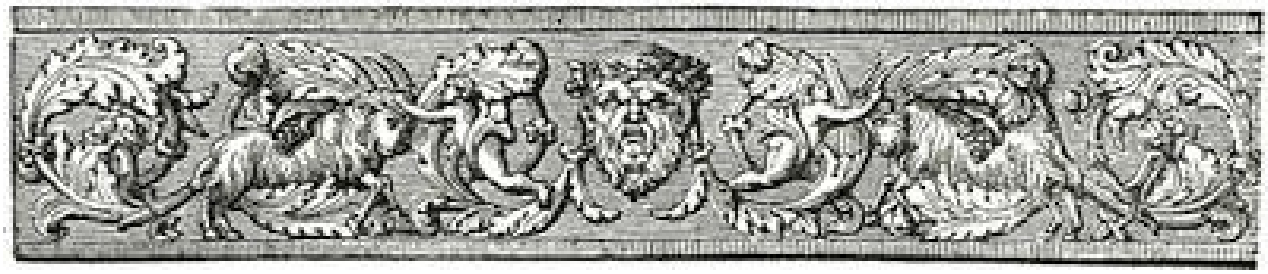
— he was growing into a wild, ungoverned, headstrong creature. Not a single thing that could nourish in him bodily vigour, strength of frame, or a high sense of pride was treated with indifference. In Deborah's view, a man had need of two things and two things only — a frame of iron and an honour that brooked no compromise. His education was, in consequence, military from first to last; any rhetorician worth his gown would have pronounced it flat barbarism. His governor in name — Icolm-Kill, that former rebel and former pirate — taught him horsemanship, the use of the pistol, swimming, rowing, the management of a broadsword, and swordsmanship in all its forms; the gamekeepers instructed him in the use of the fowling-piece, in shooting, in hunting on horseback, in the blowing of the horn — in short, in all that belongs to the fine art of the hunt; and, the better to toughen his body against all manner of hardship, they would frequently take him along when they went to beat the coverts. Vengeance took to every one of these pursuits with uncommon natural aptitude, gave himself to them wholly and unreservedly, and succeeded in all of them to a ravishing degree. These unruly habits so carefully nurtured in him, these fierce passions so deliberately fired, all conspired to heighten further his natural impetuosity, his audacity, and his inborn courage. The result was a boy who had become, in every sense, indomitable. His strong love for his mother, warm as it was, was insufficient any longer to keep him

tethered to her side. The salon saw little enough of him under its panelled roof. Never still, never out of some tumult or other, he was of all demons the most inexorable — a genuine devil if ever there was one! No mischief too great, no escapade too reckless for his invention! He would fight his dogs and carry their kennels by storm; he went boar-hunting using the farmyard swine as his pack; he blew the carp out of the ornamental pool; he gathered the orchard's crop with a blunderbuss. At every one of these outbursts, which would have been the despair of any number of other mothers, Deborah clapped her hands in private; it was her own doing, and she was not displeased with herself. It was no precocious clerk Deborah wished to rear, but a lion cub; not a simpering coxcomb, but a man of mettle. Since he must one day take his place among men, she was steeling him against them; there was, besides, no saying that the time might not come when he would have his father to avenge; and a father's blood is not avenged with a fine turn of phrase.



[1] *Parterres*: ornamental garden beds arranged in geometric patterns, a defining feature of the formal French garden style associated with Le Nôtre and the great estates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[2] *Ha-ha*: a sunken boundary wall or ditch designed to prevent livestock from crossing into the pleasure grounds of a park without interrupting the view from the house; the term, widely used in eighteenth-century landscape gardening in both France and Britain, is thought to derive from the exclamation of surprise at encountering the concealed drop.



XX.

Nine days after he had been brought up from the oubliette, the crucifix Patrick had requested was delivered to him. It was a handsome thing: the figure of Christ in silver, the cross itself of ebony and dressed with goldsmith's work, and at the base the engraved name of M. de Lamoignon de Malesherbes. Accepting the crucifix with heartfelt gratitude, he raised it to his lips and let himself be carried upon a tide of gentle, inward joy — a joy almost without admixture of sadness, since it rested on a hope he had every reason to regard as certain. A man both powerful and generous, who had exerted himself so zealously to bring him up from his dungeon and had so readily lent himself to so simple a request, was not one to renege on a formal pledge. Liberty, in Patrick's mind, stood already at his door. He kept his ears straining continually; at the slightest stir about the place he heard it knocking to be let in. Meanwhile, that implacable man, M. de Rougemont, with a degree of

obligingness most unlike himself, was scrupulously ensuring that his prisoner received, in strict compliance with M. de Malesherbes's orders, every imaginable delicacy of treatment. To all appearances, his heart had suddenly opened itself to the cause of humanity. Yet in all this reformation there was an element of studied performance, of deliberate parade, which, to any observer less anxious than Patrick to take this double-dealer seriously, must surely have cast a shadow of doubt upon the whole business. There is, when one chafes at constraint, a particular relish to be found in overdoing what one has been obliged to do at all. We are disposed to yield more than was demanded of us; we enjoy the sensation of transgressing the appointed bounds. Order a child whose apron is full of fruit to give you just one piece against his liking, and he will fling the entire apronful at your head.

Then Patrick saw everything of which he had been plundered returned to him one by one — from the effects removed on his first arrival at the Keep to the various seizures made by the most recent lieutenant. The antique ring that Sir Francis Meadowbanks had given on his death-bed to his Debby, which Deborah had placed upon Patrick's finger as a pledge of their union, and which that Putiphar woman had been unable to prise from its setting, now flashed upon his hand again with all its former pride! It was a sweetness beyond telling to recover so many old friends given up for

lost, the very recollection of several of which had been growing fainter with each passing day; yet there was pain too, and regrets bitter enough: of Deborah's jewels and adornments, the valise contained not a trace. The Chevalier de Rougemont professed complete ignorance as to what had become of them; but it was a bare-faced lie from start to finish — the thieving rascal!

When the baths and the good old wine had between them worked a little life and sap back beneath his withered bark, Patrick, collecting the still-slender remnants of his strength, addressed himself to drawing up the account M. de Malesherbes had asked of him; and the instant it was done, M. de Rougemont set about with conspicuous readiness to have it duly dispatched. It was a reasonable enough assumption on Patrick's part that his release would come swiftly in the wake of the document being sent. He depended on it without reservation; the matter was as good as settled — promised, assured, beyond all question. With his chains still gripped between his claws, he was already beating his wings, testing the air for flight. He seethed with eagerness, he ached, he cried out for it; hanging over the gunwale, his bare arms outstretched above the water, he was primed to weigh anchor at the first signal given. But the hours — light-footed hinds for the man bent on pleasure, slow and heavy-shelled tortoises for the suffering soul — dragged on; week upon

week piled up, each one dragging forward as slowly as a cart bogged axle-deep in mire, and the voice that was to have called through the bars — *Rise up, and be free!* — remained stubbornly silent. The silence had grown past all explaining, and Patrick, who would do anything rather than endure any longer the waiting that was eating him alive, made up his mind at last to write to his benefactor, and sent him the following letter — brief, but noble in every word, and admirably contrived to bring certain matters back to mind, in the event that M. de Malesherbes had suffered them to slip from it:

My lord

The prisoner to whom, in your mercy, you were good enough to give a Christ — the most sacred of all emblems — now awaits from you the most sacred of all things: liberty.

The appeal was as a blow struck upon the door of an empty house: no face showed at the window, no one returned an answer. Before the letter, silence; after it, the same silence. The knot refused to loosen, and the days continued their relentless march; with each day that passed, despair ate a little further into Patrick's hope. The building he had raised in his mind of his approaching happiness was cracked and fissured on all sides, and giving way stone by stone. Where once

Patrick had counted, upon liberty's rosy fingers, all the delights liberty was about to give back to him, he now checked himself and counted them again, with a heavy heart, upon the bronze fingers of Fate.

Cruel as that anguish was, in which he had existed — if existence it deserved to be named — for months together, it reached its conclusion all too quickly. Sudden and violent, the reversal of the humane treatment he had known since M. de Malesherbes's visit came to illuminate his true position in a single harsh stroke. Sickened by what was being readied for him, Patrick had laid his indignation before the King's lieutenant, who now, stripping off his mask at last, returned him this answer:

"Give up, pray — I beg it of you earnestly — all hope of ever seeing freedom again. M. de Malesherbes is out of office, and you are my enemy; I have you; not a word of complaint; the pit in which you ought to be rotting is not yet filled."

M. de Malesherbes had, it was quite true, just resigned his department, resolved to follow Turgot[1] into retirement, and unmoved by all the King's entreaties that he should stay; but that he had done so without ordering Patrick's release beforehand — that is a thing which no reasonable mind can ever accept. It may be, as some have affirmed, that during his far too brief ministry — the memory of which is all gentleness — weighed down with work and affairs, amid a

thousand duties and a thousand distractions, encumbered by the crowds of prisoners he was discharging from the state gaols, M. de Malesherbes did leave some wretched souls forgotten in their cells, whose irons his virtue should have struck off; but that Patrick could have been one of that forgotten number — impossible! Patrick, on whom his charity had settled with so marked and particular an interest; Patrick, to whom his fatherly kindness had so eagerly and so graciously made a gift at once so sacred and so precious. No, I say again, it cannot be! No — M. le Chevalier de Rougemont must have played M. de Malesherbes false, as Patrick believed it, and as we are well obliged to believe it with him. The villain must, of a certainty, have withheld both Patrick's written account and his letter; and he must, just as certainly, have received the order for Patrick's release — an order he chose to disobey. That ferocious man, that dull and swaggering ruffian who harboured within his heart — if heart there was — an implacable hatred of Patrick, and most particularly in memory of Fitz-Harris, had been wholly incapable, one may be sure, of bearing even for an instant the thought of losing the prey into whose very flesh his nails sank deeper each day with a hideousness of pleasure ever renewed.

Hitherto, Patrick's elevated spirit had maintained itself in all its strength. His soul had remained beautiful, noble, and sound in its judgement; his body alone had yielded to

misfortune and undergone its melancholy decline; but this last assault was the one that finally broke him. His reason was profoundly shaken. His judgement went astray and cracked from crown to base, like a piece of crystal struck by a sudden impact; and, straying from all that had been most native to it, his gentle and distinguished nature degenerated. Plunged into a deep and settled disgust with everything about him, he began henceforth, by slow degrees, to let go of all self-cultivation, all those daily observances a man owes to his own person — a sad symptom, and a telling one! He who in suffering had always been so grudging of complaints and tears now went about with a tear perpetually caught upon the edge of his eyelid, or settled in the sunken hollow of his wasted and livid cheek. Prostrate before his own epitaph — graved by Fitz-Harris on the wall, as the reader will recall — his lips fastened upon his crucifix, he spent with unvarying regularity every hour of his interminable day. Each spring found him exactly where autumn had left him. Nine of the fairest years that are given to man he spent thus, stretched upon that gridiron, the victim of a dull, unvarying pain, racked in every fibre by the obsequious torments of a gaoler whose cruelty was equalled only by his inexhaustible industry.

These nine years, which passed so slowly for Patrick, each day a fresh bitter draught to be swallowed, we shall now step over in a single pace. For who indeed could muster

courage enough in himself to follow such an agony from one crisis to the next?

Then, at last, on a winter's night — the 27th of February 1784, or so my memory would have it — the triple doors of his dungeon were thrown open all at once, and M. de Rougemont appeared, torch in hand, and cried aloud:

"Rise, prisoner, and follow me; you are free!"

In the yard below, a coach waited with its door ajar; M. de Rougemont pressed him, with great civility, to be good enough to get in.

"You are too gracious by half, sir," said Patrick, with something of a smile. "I had not looked, I confess, for a coach to carry me to my liberty — to have opened the wicket and lowered the bridge would have served the purpose well enough."

As he climbed in, two figures who were already seated in the carriage shrank back at the sight of him with a movement of fear and pity combined; for, shaggy with beard and hair, pale, livid, and wasted to nothing, the lurid light and heavy shadow of the night gave him the appearance and the very translucency of an apparition. Two other figures, of no very distinguished appearance, having also climbed in after him, the door closed and the horses started forward. Once the two men who had shrunk back at Patrick's appearance had

recovered their self-possession, they put several polite questions to him. What they were, those questions, and what he said in answer, I do not know; but one may well suppose they bore upon his misery, for after he had spoken a little while, each of the two took his hand in turn and pressed it with a hearty cordiality. Tender and unfeigned compassion is to be found nowhere so readily as in hearts where misfortune has taken root, or through which misfortune has at some time passed: these two men, who had so entirely forgotten their own unhappy situation in their feeling for Patrick's, were themselves his fellow-prisoners, just released from the Keep as he was; one of them, the one in the plainer clothes, was merely a gentleman of Toulouse — the Comte de Solages[2] — arrested during the Amelot ministry[3] at his father's own request, on account of an irregular mode of life and certain youthful indiscretions; but the other, he was one of the glories of France — a martyr who had not arrived at his Calvary until he had passed, one after another, through the Château de Chaufour, the Château de Saumur, the Conciergerie, the Château de Miolans, Pierre-Encise on two occasions, exile at La Coste, imprisonment at Vincennes, and finally, at the time of which we write, the Bastille itself.

The world persists in honouring Napoleon's supposed wisdom by laying at his door the confinement of that most famous among the famous in a house of madmen — written

down, repeated aloud, handed about as truth — but the truth it is not; it never was; it is a slander, plain and entire! No; this piece of cruelty was not the handiwork of Napoleon's resourceful and practical intelligence. The affair dates back to June 1789, when, after a most absurd quarrel with the officers commanding the Bastille, this personage had been taken to the convent of Charenton for the first time; he had won free of it during the tumult of the Revolution by virtue of a decree never intended to apply to him; and he had already been placed back within those walls at a moment when Buonaparte had not yet ripened into so much as the semblance of an emperor. One may add that it would ill have become the Corsican emperor to make such summary arrangements for a Roman colleague.

The glory of France of whom I speak, if I must be explicit, was none other than the celebrated author of a book that you all cry out against as an infamy, and that every one of you, as I happen to know, carries upon his person — I ask your forgiveness, dear reader, for saying so; he was, I say it again, that most high and most puissant seigneur, the Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de Sade,[4] whose fallen sons carry today, in our very midst, a brow as noble as it is proud, as noble as it is pure.

By far the greater portion of the baggage loaded upon a species of cart that kept pace behind the carriage was the

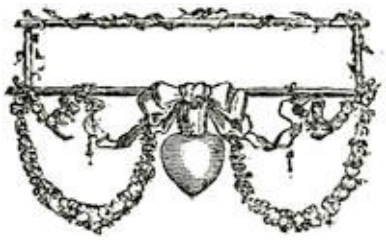
property of this nobleman, for to his grander imperial appetites he joined an equally imperious fondness for gorgeous apparel; his wardrobe, in very truth and without a particle of exaggeration, ran to upwards of two hundred coats, laced or embroidered to the last degree of magnificence — all of which we shall presently have the grim satisfaction of seeing paraded in a masquerade drenched in blood.

On rolled the carriage at a measured pace, never once altering its course. That February night was of so dense a blackness that our prisoners could make out next to nothing of their surroundings; yet all their senses conspired to assure them that the capital was near. Then at last, after sundry cries of "Who goes there?" had pierced the stillness of the night, and dull stirrings and the clash of bolts and the turning of hinges had made themselves heard, the carriage halted suddenly and was opened from without. Down climbed at once the two dour and silent companions of the journey, who now dropped all pretence and, in the plain capacity of police agents, motioned our three prisoners to follow them. There waited beside the carriage door a body of officers and guard-sergeants, armed with swords, and gaolers carrying torches and keys; these men seized Patrick the instant his foot left the step. The full extent of the betrayal flashing upon him in an instant, Patrick looked wildly about at the towering walls that

hemmed him in on every side, and all at once he knew it for what it was: the inner court of the Bastille, that very ground he had walked through, light of heart, one-and-twenty years before, carrying to Fitz-Harris those letters of pardon he had torn from the clutches of the Putiphar's hatred. He uttered a terrible cry and fell, his forehead upon the pavement.

Chiefly instructed, it is said, by Mirabeau's famous treatise on the *lettres de cachet*,[5] regarding the abuses and the detestable régime of Vincennes, the new minister of Paris, Monsieur le Baron de Breteuil,[6] had but recently commanded its evacuation. The Commandancy of the Castle, the Lieutenancy of the Keep, Monsieur Paulmi d'Argenson with his officers and his guard of thirty, Monsieur le Chevalier de Rougemont with his turnkeys and his fat little benefits — at a stroke, the whole apparatus was razed and swept aside; and, before long, when the prisoners had all been scattered to various strongholds, and when the unyielding Prévôt de Beaumont[7] — who had set his face against any fresh transfer — had at length given way and, of his own good will, opened up the dungeon they had in vain laid siege to, this Tower, so famous and so feared, long the abode of kings, long the prison of states, sank to the humble condition of a bakehouse which provided the bread of Paris at a sou the cheaper for every four pounds; and where, had the earth been turned but a little, bread might have been had without wheat,

as in the desperate times of the League[8] — bread made of the flour of bones.



[1] *Turgot*: Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727–1781), the reforming Comptroller-General of Finances under Louis XVI, whose programme of liberal economic reform — including the abolition of the guilds and the corvée — provoked fierce opposition from the privileged orders; he was dismissed in May 1776.

[2] *Comte de Solages*: The *Affaire de Solages* (1765–89) concerned Pauline de Solages (1740–c.1800), married to Jean Antoine de Barrau, and her brother Hubert de Solages (1746–1824). After Pauline fled her abusive marriage with her brother's help, both were arrested under lettres de cachet obtained by their father and brother-in-law. Pauline was confined for years in convents, while Hubert endured twenty-four years of captivity in various fortresses, including Vincennes and the Bastille, where he was among the seven prisoners released on 14 July 1789. The case, marked by accusations of misconduct, financial intrigue, and even rumours of incest, remains one of the most notorious examples of arbitrary imprisonment under the Ancien Régime.

[3] *The Amelot ministry*: Jean-Jacques Amelot de Chaillou (1689–1749), marquis of Combrande and baron de Châtillon-sur-Indre, was a French magistrate and politician. Rising through the royal administration, he served as intendant of La Rochelle (1720–26), intendant des finances (1726), and Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1737–44). He was also surintendant des Postes and a member of the Académie française (elected 1727). His career reflected the consolidation of administrative power under Louis XV, and his son Antoine-Jean Amelot de Chaillou continued the family's political legacy.

[4] Donatien-Alphonse-François, Marquis de Sade (1740–1814): French nobleman, soldier, and writer, whose name became synonymous with the literary exploration of transgression and cruelty; he was imprisoned repeatedly under the Ancien Régime, the Revolution, and the Napoleonic period. Borel's defence of Sade against the charge that Napoleon ordered his confinement at Charenton, and his pointed reference to Sade's sons carrying a "brow as noble as it is proud," reflects the Romantic writers' complex admiration for Sade as a martyr of tyranny. The wardrobe of two hundred coats is historically attested.

[5] Mirabeau's treatise on the *lettres de cachet*: Honoré-Gabriel Riqueti, Comte de Mirabeau (1749–1791), himself imprisoned at Vincennes by *lettre de cachet* from 1777 to 1780, used his confinement to write *Des lettres de cachet et des prisons d'état* (1782), a systematic indictment of the system of arbitrary

detention; it became one of the most influential reform documents of the pre-Revolutionary period.

[6] *Baron de Breteuil*: Louis-Auguste Le Tonnelier, Baron de Breteuil (1730–1807), Minister of the Royal Household from 1783 to 1788; his order to evacuate Vincennes in 1784 dispersed its remaining prisoners, including Sade and Solages, to the Bastille and other establishments.

[7] *Prévôt de Beaumont:* Gilles-Germain de Prévôt de Beaumont (c. 1726–1823), a journalist and pamphleteer imprisoned at Vincennes for decades on account of his writings attacking government monopolies; his stubborn refusal of transfer became something of a cause célèbre in the months before the Revolution.

[8] *The League*: The *Catholic League* (1576–95), founded by Henry, Duke of Guise, was a coalition of Catholic nobles and urban militias during the French Wars of Religion. Created to oppose the spread of Protestantism and to uphold Catholic orthodoxy, it gained significant influence under royal patronage, especially after the death of François, Duke of Anjou, in 1584. The League sought to exclude the Protestant Henry of Navarre (later Henry IV) from the succession, leading to civil war and foreign intervention. Its eventual decline followed Henry IV's conversion to Catholicism and consolidation of power, marking the end of its political relevance.

XXI.

Lend me your hand, my lord reader; and your hand too, my fair lady — charming still beneath its scented glove — and together let us climb the swift, winding path that coils upward and fastens, ribbon-like, about the shoulder of the hill. Hark — the guard-dogs growl at our coming; their baying rolls out and rings through the air. Here is the gate of Évêquemont's manor-house; let us ring and be done with it. — Come, follow me.

Vengeance had but lately entered upon his sixteenth year. Reared in magnificent freedom after the feudal fashion, and held untouched by that singular corruption of the soul which men have the audacity to call education, he already carried the height and presence of a grown man; yet with a certain slenderness, an innocence, a fine-drawn quality, that partook, if the expression may be allowed, of the flower and the maiden in equal measure. In

his harmonious serenity he resembled nothing so much as a statue from antiquity — one might have said a young Greek athlete, easy and graceful, or a Norman knight whose native grace had not yet grown rigid beneath the weight of his coat of mail. Riding and hunting still claimed him with all their old fire; and yet his gentle mother Deborah was, with each passing day, establishing an ever greater sovereignty over the feelings of his heart. More willingly now he kept close to her; her company appeared to grow dearer to him, something he actively sought and was plainly the better for. At her side, the headstrong and proud young squire became all gentleness; no devoted page in the grip of his first passion could have shown a prettier or more considerate care. The soul at such an age grows gentler and more open, sensible of the approach of some feeling, some passion, which it cannot yet name and which is about to take it by storm; it brims with tenderness; it wraps itself in velvet to invite the caress; it grows velvet hands the more exquisitely to bestow one. To a young man in his early years, women are at first no more than a vast and gentle meadow, all of a piece, all of one even green; but as he presses further along the willow walk of life, that meadow grows enamelled and many-coloured and begins to reveal its individual beauties; and more and more distinctly he begins to make out, among the soft and thickly-matted grass, the elegant flowers that rise here and there above it, or those more retiring ones that hide and are crushed before he

ever marks where they grow. It is then that the young man's gaze first comes to rest; for the first time he looks with seeing eyes at his mother, at his sisters, at his sisters' friends, at his nurse; and his mother is no longer simply his mother — she is a divine creature; an onyx vase filled to the brim with the most exquisite of essences; his sisters, too, are revealed to him as beings full of charm and grace and hidden quality; his sisters' friends he finds to include several who are beautiful — beautiful enough to set the blood astir; and his old nurse strikes him for the first time as carrying about her the beautiful remnants of a past grace — remnants that give rise to an inexplicable and wistful longing.

In her son's attachment, distinguished alike by its tenderness and its devotion, Deborah might have found a well of sweet consolation, but for the sharpest disquiet that clouded the brightness of its waters. For more than a year now, a profound sadness had been written on Vengeance's young brow, and as that shadow grew deeper and darker, it struck a chill into a mother's love. He gave the constant impression of a young man absorbed in some private, unspoken reflection that rendered him a solitary creature even in the midst of others. There were moments when he sat at her side in perfect silence, cold and withdrawn; moments when he submitted to her kisses like an unfeeling statue; and moments when, with a sudden gesture, as though forcing

away some dark unwanted thought, he would press her with great tenderness against his heart and lavish upon her, in a flood of affection, the most loving of names and the sweetest of caresses. If Deborah pressed him upon his faraway looks, or asked him gently what it was that made him so downcast, he would answer with an air of perfect unconcern:

"I have nothing to complain of, Mother — what could I possibly have? No grief troubles me. I am the most frivolous of children, nothing more."

The griefs a man conceals are fed by causes yet more deeply buried — causes that the most acute and perceptive of spirits is seldom equipped to uncover. It was to the retired, uneventful routine of their life at the château that Deborah attributed the ennui she saw weighing upon Vengeance — an ennui that was itself a source of no small distress to her. With characteristic good sense, and a firm desire to put the matter right, she formed the resolve of persuading him to undertake, with Icolm-Kill at his side, a lengthy and splendid tour through the most celebrated corners of Europe; and she put the suggestion to him without delay. Whilst the journey existed only as a plan — a thing remote and unrealised — Vengeance had appeared willing enough to fall in with it; but once Deborah resolved to appoint the actual day of departure and gave instructions for the arrangements to be hurried forward, Vengeance, after a long inner battle that had cost

him dear, came to her one afternoon in her chamber, vanquished at last by his own efforts, and in a state of distress that would have wrung any heart, he said to her:

"You must believe me, Mother — it is not boredom, nor idleness, that is eating me alive! There is nothing for me on the other side of the Alps, nor yet the Pyrenees! Do not part us, Mother; it would be the death of me! Perhaps I could have gone on nursing this secret grief within me, though at what cost to myself I dare not think; but this resolution of yours has pushed me past bearing; I cannot hold my peace another day! Whatever the consequence, I must find my way out of this miserable state! Mother, I love you! You know how much I love you! Yet what I am about to say will hurt you, will pierce your heart more than once, and this from me, who would wish above all earthly things to shield you from all harm; for cursed be the son who does not stand as a wall of strength about the mother who carried him! I — who barely emerged from the swaddling-bands of infancy; I — who opened into being under your kisses; I — who grew tall in the shelter of your wings; I — who owe you so many wakeful nights and so much love, and who should draw near you only with a lowly brow, a tender look, a heart at peace and full of thankfulness, my hands clasped in reverence — I am about to set myself up against you, and put you to the torment as though I were a cruel man or a hanging judge. O my Mother!

— and yet — and yet I love you! My every wish is to be to you a thing only of gladness and of honour. Forgive me, Mother, forgive me! Little enough do I know, and few enough are the books I have read; but I have noticed much, and I have thought long and hard. I have looked abroad through all of nature. I have sought out the spring, the beginning of all beings and all things. No nest in hedge or tree but I have bent over it. I have gone into the cow-shed and the sheepfold. I have found my way into the homes of men; I have kept my ears open; and I have come to see that all of creation has a father — all of it save me alone! The injustice of it has broken something within me. I have bent all my efforts towards fathoming this mystery. I have taxed my mind to the utmost; the suffering of it has been — and remains — very great; yet for all my efforts, I am no further forward than on the day when my understanding first opened its eyes. That, Mother, is the root of the suffering that bears me down; you will readily see that it is not a tour through foreign lands that can heal it. What have I done, that fortune should use me so? Wherein lies my unworthiness, that fate should give me less than it gives to the basest thing alive? Where is my father? Where in this world is he? And what is he — who is he? I beseech you, my dear Mother, say something, anything, about him! Point him out to me! This ignorance in which I am held is a constant torment to me; and that empty place at your side — so plainly empty — fills my heart with a kind of terror!

And shall I never — never — draw to my heart this man who must be, as you are, so good, so noble, so full of love, and for whom I must be so cherished and so precious a creature? Think of it! There is a man walking under the heavens who gave me the most magnificent thing a man may give: the very gift of life! Who gave me his own blood, which at this very moment runs through my veins and passes through my heart! This man! This great benefactor! I am a stranger to him! I am not at his feet, as I ought to be! Fear nothing in the telling, Mother, you will not suffer for it; my tenderness is no fixed sum to be split in two; one and the same filial love shall fold you both within its warmth! Around me, everywhere I have looked, there has been nothing but darkness and doubt, nothing to set me upon any kind of path; and so at last I have put the question to myself directly: am I an orphan? Is my father dead? If dead he is, whence comes it that we possess nothing of his? Where is his seal? Where his sword? If he is dead, and the grave yonder on the grass is indeed his, how does it come to have no epitaph, to display a veiled escutcheon, and to hold no earthly remains? Can it be that the winds have dispersed you utterly, O dust of my father? If he is dead, and you are left a widow — whence comes it that you have the mourning weeds but not the widow's right of name? If my father is dead — then is his own father dead? His mother? Your father and your mother? Is there truly no one left? Are you a fallen star — one that broke, in its plunging

fall, every thread that held it, so that upon this earth where everything, as I observe, is bound to everything else, nothing binds you to anything at all? Oh, what a guilty, cruel creature I am! Ungrateful beyond all excuse — to press so bold, so heavy a hand against the most sacred and most inviolable suffering in the world! Oh, Mother, do not cry; each tear of yours falls upon my heart and brands it as with a live ember! Truth here is not what shows itself openly; a thick veil has been thrown over it. A past lies behind us that shuns every gaze; and yet every single thing about us gives away the fact of its existence. O Mother! I implore you — out of your love for me — do not condemn me to this gloomy perplexity a single day more! Why keep from me who you are? Who I am? Whither I am bound, and whence I came? Am I truly so undeserving of your trust in this matter? Young I still am, it is true, but I am not a frivolous creature; you have shaped in me a nature that is steady and strong; the weight of things is not lost upon me, nor their value; and I shall make no ill use of whatever secret you place in my keeping, Mother — if secret indeed there is! O Mother! Be merciful — tell me whether I have a father; whether I have seen him without knowing it; whether I am yet to see him; whether you love him, and whether it is right that I should love him? Oh, do not withhold from me where he is to be found, be it a retreat, an exile, or a hiding-place! What joy it would be, what happiness beyond all telling, to see that man, to take his hands and kiss

them, and say to him simply: 'Good day to you, Father.' But if it has been fate's will to take him from us, to wrench him from your love and deny me his own — then oh! guide my steps to his urn, and I shall bathe it with my tears! Tell me his name — the very name I bear — that I may say it with a blessing! Tell me of his life, that I may walk in the path he walked! Tell me what his virtues were, that I may spend myself in the effort to be worthy of them! Have mercy on me, Mother! Give me my father, or give me his urn, or his sword at least!"

Something in the whole of it had struck Deborah's soul with sudden and overwhelming force: the manner of his coming, so unexpected; the agitation that wrought so visibly in him; that look of inward intensity; the passion in every word; the gentle, reverent care with which he had approached his confession; and that trembling, reluctant dread he had suffered before he could bring himself to speak it. Motionless in her painful agitation, watching over her child with brooding eyes, she listened with an anxious heart, taking in his every utterance. But when at last he gave voice, mournfully, to this grievance — that all creation knew a father, himself alone deprived — the blow fell upon her with annihilating force, striking remorselessly at the whole of her suffering, ripping open all her wounds anew. Convulsed to her very core, weighed down past endurance, her heart seemed to overturn

in her breast as a light is quenched, and abundant tears came streaming from her eyes. At last, having won back some small dominion over her feelings, she spoke with motherly gentleness:

"Know, dear child, that if the past has been guarded so carefully from your sight, it is on account of its gloom, its hideousness! It would have been cruel beyond measure — wantonly, pointlessly cruel — to have clouded your youthful mind with such knowledge, to have darkened that pure and tranquil sky which overspread your innocent years. Take your pleasure in these young years whilst you may, drink deep of present blessings, imagine for yourself a future full of promise; but whatever you do, look not behind you. There exist matters that envenom the spirit, and a young heart must be kept pure of all such infection. Our past, you must know, is as a sponge saturated with wormwood: the harder you should squeeze it, the more copiously would its bitterness flow. Attempt not to peer over my shoulder into what I have kept hidden. Let it be enough that you possess your mother's love. I do not mean to play you false, nor have I anything to keep perpetually disguised — only have patience a little while more. A day is coming when all must be made known, it cannot be otherwise; but beg God with all your strength that the day be delayed as long as can be, for it will fill your heart to bursting with rage; your teeth will gnash, and you will bite

down furiously upon bread that is nothing but ash and venom. Love me well, hold me ever in your mind, make your life mine! There shall be no mourning clouding that young face of yours. Let what is past remain so; seek only to be happy. Look about you — flowers in their beauty, women all grace and charm; what fine blood runs in your horses; the deer are everywhere thick in the coverts. There now, Master Brooding-Mind, come into your mother's arms; come and let me kiss you! I am not angered by this little revolt of yours; quite the reverse — I am proud to see such excellence of mind in you, such sensitivity, such worthy and elevated feelings!"

Such unction had Deborah poured into her speech, such unutterable gentleness had passed with her words across her lips, her very discomposure had added such fresh charm to all her natural grace, that Vengeance, troubled and softened to the heart, threw himself with intoxicated abandon at her knees and lavished kisses upon her hands. The moment, however, was swiftly mastered — his accustomed unease soon darkened his brow once more; he rose with an air of stubborn resolve and exclaimed with passion fiercer still:

"No, no, I beg you, Mother, urge me no more! I cannot go on living in such dreadful uncertainty. For pity's sake, lift this ignorance from me! Be the past ever so shadowed, I shall not be crushed beneath it; this doubt inflicts the greater

torment; the truth cannot wither my youth or ensnare my every thought in that acrid, foul-smelling web. Where, Mother, where is my father? In mercy's name, where is he, and who? Nothing is known to me! It is a wretched, fearful thing! I am afraid that in any human visage I may trace him out. Whether it be the weeping greybeard at the road's edge or the fine gentleman riding by in all his magnificence, I am seized with the same deadly shudder. I am like a lamb bereft, hunting through the flock for a mother gone astray — so do I hunt for my father in the multitude of mankind. Nature and reason, were they the judges, would admit of only one sort of paternity, but I am not ignorant of the world's distinctions; in the world's judgement there are sinful paternities and sons who are cast off. How am I to bear myself amongst men? Shall I walk through the gate, or steal in by a back way? Am I to be singled out by pointing fingers, or greeted with respectful bows? If I am stained from birth, understand that I do not intend to bow my head and sue for mercy — not at all; I mean simply to follow the road that is mine. For the man the world accepts, the way is drawn and level, established and secure; for the outcast, there remains daring, defiance, fame, and the thrill of the unknown! The world expects the bastard to earn his way out of bastardy. Bastard! You wince at the word, Mother; do not trouble yourself — if bastard I am, no one will see me blush for it. Better to be the fruit of love than the fruit of habit; I heard that sentiment expressed once, and

I think it nobly put. Let him beware who seeks to make me ashamed of it! You weep; my words wound you deeply; my heart spoke true: bastard I am! Bastard! Bastard! Why then, so be it, Mother! Let me have a sword! This world that spurns me shall ring with my name! A sword, I say! The world will crouch at my feet, and I shall redeem my bastard race in the true-born blood of those I conquer!

"So then, Mother! Now that I have uncovered my whole heart and mind to you, am I ripe enough in your judgement? May I not claim your trust at last? This is ever the way of it; a mother obstinately sees only the child where a man now stands. And who, for that matter, ever had the capacity to fathom what a child knows or how he thinks? You believe him taken up with a plaything, when in truth he is dreaming of overturning nations, envisioning the rage of Luther or the martial glory of another Alexander. Say it, Mother, only say it! What frightens you so? You know well that I love you with my whole heart! What could I possibly discover that would tear me away from you? I am the arm that defends you, your living armour! You are my heaven, my idol, my life! Have no fear and speak — were you the most wretched and sinful creature on earth.... Oh, speak, I implore you! By your silence you conjure up ghastly suspicions, you make me conceive of things unspeakably vile.... By Heaven, madam, tell me —

where is my father, what have you done? The moment has arrived, I tell you, when the past must be accounted for!"

In a state of disturbance that may readily be pictured, Deborah rose resolutely to her feet, and having unlocked with trembling urgency the door to the secret apartment — closed and bolted like a strongbox — she caught Vengeance by the hand and urged him to follow. She came to a halt at a portrait illuminated by a burning lamp and exclaimed in a voice riven with sorrow:

"There, merciless boy, there is your father, there is Patrick — slain by an assassin!"

"Assassinated! And by whose hand, pray tell me, Mother?" Vengeance rejoined slowly and powerfully, his eyes locked upon hers with the pitiless scrutiny of a hanging judge.

Bruised in spirit, stunned, nay terrified perhaps by the vehemence and defiance of this mere child, her soul overwhelmed by the burden of so many grim, horrible, bitter recollections which this wearying scene had stirred to life, shattered, enfeebled, utterly undone, Deborah sank to her knees, then crumpled entirely, and with arms drooping and closed about each other like a bracelet, her head bent in sorrow, she remained grief-stricken and speechless as Magdalene kneeling at the foot of the cross. A little way off from her stood Vengeance, the blaze of his outburst now

extinguished, turning frightened looks this way and that. An extraordinary sight had abruptly disclosed itself before his eyes and now possessed his senses completely. The secret room into which his mother had just led him, where nobody — not even we — had hitherto set foot, in which Deborah had whiled away countless quiet hours, was entirely swathed in black hangings, ceiling and walls together, and the silver lamp flickering before Patrick's image furnished the sole glimmer to temper the thick shadows of this meditative retreat.

For a while Deborah appeared lost to herself in that affecting attitude, when all at once she rose with a dignified air and said in tones of reproach:

"Sir, the son is given to the mother to respect and venerate her, not to put her to the question! Doubt, distrust, prying curiosity where she is concerned — all these are vile and blameworthy! You are greatly at fault towards me, sir; by rights I should chastise you and erect an impassable wall between us! Still, I am good-natured.... You will do well to understand that if I hold back, it is not because there exists in the past any matter to my discredit! You will have it so, sir? You make it a demand? Then you shall have it! May Heaven dispose as it sees fit!"

Moving to the daybed, she positioned herself upon it and signalled to Vengeance to sit at her side. Once Vengeance had

taken his seat, their hands found each other and held fast with loving pressure; the mother then spoke to her son:

"I am going to trace events back to their very source; I shall pass over nothing, not the smallest detail; the full truth is about to emerge from my mouth. Receive each word as though sworn upon the blood of Patrick himself."

Yet Deborah returned again to silence. The lips that had begun to open closed again before the anguished confession she was about to offer, as certain tender flowers fold themselves at the coming of dusk; she was undoubtedly steeling herself; deep within she was testing the currents, like one fearful of swimming, before she could bring herself to dive into the bitter, saline wave of memory. Much as some Ischian fisherman might sit upon Cape Misenum,[1] musing and sending his affectionate yet grave regard across the blue waters of Baiae, from Capri's isle to the Neapolitan gulf, from the coastline to the farthest edge of sight — so she, her heart softened, let her vision roam freely across the expanse of her departed years; she took the measure of their grief. In the end, bending under the weight of memory as a piano key bends under the finger pressing it down, and after taking the additional comfort of a few gentle precautions, she launched into the unadorned and honest telling of her calamities, the groove of which, springing from the foot of her infant bed in Cockermouth Castle, wound its way in crooked furrows, cut

by a fateful hand, right up to the manor-house of Évêquemont — and even there was not complete.

Deborah, endowed with such nimble ingenuity of mind, brought remarkable finesse to this most precarious opening. Steered by her exquisite and well-considered tact, she laboured to expand upon all those incidents that could call forth in the heart of her defiant youth nothing save mild and plaintive emotions; she let her speech, naturally full of persuasive grace, rise to genuine eloquence. Still, with all the finesse of an experienced equerry, every time she had glimpsed the approach of some painful incident or savage jolt, she had known to bridle her speech and keep it spare and moderate.

For the entire span of this anguished revelation, his elbow resting on the sculptured frame of the daybed, his brow cradled in his hand, his look unchanging, Vengeance had listened with an outward show of great composure, with an intensity of focus not usual in one so young. And once the tale was told, showing neither eagerness nor any mark of strong emotion, he had knelt at his mother's side, clasped her hands in his, and pressed them several times with loving devotion to his mouth; and raising to her a regard in which sorrow and admiration were commingled, having faltered through a few grateful acknowledgements and some gentle words of consolation:

"See me well, Mother," he had told her. "I am not the boy I once was! I am a man — aged by care, and aged still more by all I have this moment heard! Mother, be without fear; I shall not misuse the confidence you have placed in me, young though I am!"

Lady Barrymore, expecting after the feverish excitement Vengeance had originally shown that some violent scene would follow, and now deceived by this façade of sense and self-control, laid all the merit of this favourable change at the door of the judicious care she had taken in making her disclosures; she quietly applauded her own cleverness and strategic handling. Alas for her! Alas for the mother! The face of humanity is no more than a playhouse curtain caked with paint and rouge, through which nothing can be seen, not even the making-ready of the most terrible tragedy.

Twice the manor bell had to ring, gently pulling at their attention and bidding them come to supper, before they could finally be prised away from the tender exchanges that had followed, in which the two of them were recovering from their very real and multifarious emotions. How great a change had been wrought in so short a time! The warring sides had closed ranks and joined as one. The one laying siege had opened his tent-flap, the one under siege had unbarred the gate. The sword that had been drawn to destroy had instead given the kiss of peace. The tearful mother, who in the frenzy

of a maenad[2] had pulled her impetuous and dreadful son into the funereal room, was now quitting that place peaceful and beaming, he filled with pride and caressing her tenderly. They walked now like two creatures bound by love and full of fellow-feeling, joyful, each glorying in the other, exchanging glances with every step they took. The arm wrapped softly round Deborah's shapely waist, his head resting on her fine shoulder, Vengeance walked onward through a deluge of kisses.

He spent the evening in his usual fashion, in the salon with his mother, enjoying a charming lack of occupation; Deborah busied herself with her embroidery work, while he sprawled carelessly in an armchair, holding a book he made no attempt to read. Save for two or three seemingly trivial enquiries, which he made with a show of indifference that was possibly somewhat too affected — a circumstance to which Deborah paid no heed — not a single word was uttered about the weighty subjects so lately agitated, not one blow of the spade struck again into the heap of ruins so freshly upheaved. To witness such an outward show of utter obliviousness, you would have thought a month had intervened between noon and dusk; that time in its course had effaced imprints made upon the sand. Does the placid surface of the water preserve any sign of the waves that have been laid to rest? Whenever Vengeance, spurred on by his

mother, took up the conversation again, he displayed sufficient liveliness; yet as if he were still troubled by some lingering intimate anxiety that he had difficulty masking, he would frequently let his phrase trail off unfinished, give just two or three hacks with the pruning-hook at his notion, and by a gradual decline quickly lapsed back into silence. Yet even in their quietness the fresh sense of pride within them was made manifest. One saw plainly — it stood out like a young shoot on the trunk — that they had lately risen in one another's regard; that they had lately ratified in their hearts, to each other's advantage, fresh credentials of nobility and trustworthiness. It was visible — it breathed forth from every pore — that the boy had abruptly become in his mother's eyes a man to be trusted, a soul of rectitude, proven and of rich character; a weapon of superior and well-chosen temper, piercing and keen; a field poised to open beneath the world's plough, ready to cast up its grain; stable ground whereon to build the edifice of a glorious existence. And that for his part the mother was no longer in the child's eyes a woman with no lineage or history; a pebble worn smooth in the bed of some river now lost to memory; a fragment ripped from the vault of heaven, or dragged from the slime; a woman, to put it plainly, with a mark of shame cut like diamond into her brow; a Court mare pensioned off to the remount service, the cast-off of some petty princeling ruined or turned recluse; an Aspasia[3] sunk into disuse, a strumpet abdicated!

At eleven Vengeance stood up to say farewell to his mother for the night. They clasped each other for a considerable time, luxuriating in the embrace; but instead of retreating to his chambers as he ordinarily did, Vengeance, once he had gained the portico, slipped unobtrusively into the park, making for the cherished edges of the spring. An oaken scent travelled on the wind; the vault of heaven was the purest shade of blue; Phoebe cast her loving regard upon the earth below; and the stars sparkled as if God had just burnished them afresh.

There, his mind utterly detached in the midst of that majestic scene, grave and silent, now sitting upon a rock, now pacing with long strides through the thickets, his head borne more haughtily, his fist planted haughtily at his side, our young orphan stayed on well into the night, like those tiny flies that lose all sense of time whilst playing in the moon's argent rays. Then all of a sudden, as if he had finally picked from the juniper trees that most elusive blossom of firm purpose, he left the park in haste and went to his chamber, where his lamp, waiting for him half-dimmed and bathed in the glories of the night, appeared like the flame kept burning at a wake. Taking from the wall his sword, his pistols, and his loyal carbine, and then a miniature likeness of his mother, which he smothered with kisses and pressed to his breast, he dashed off a few words in haste, left them on the table, threw

his mantle about him, and immediately stole forth again with the utmost stealth. Gaining the lawn close by Patrick's memorial, he went down on one knee — the steel pommel of his sword gleamed at his flank in the grass like a firefly — and braced himself against the wooden stock of his musket. After preserving that pious stance for a time, he sprang up with fervour and exclaimed:

"Speak, Father — am I not acting as I ought? Is this not what you would advise? Why, I should be a craven creature, unfit to have been born of my mother! No, it will not be! It cannot possibly be! Speak to me, my father's dust — is it not so? Is it not? Never shall it be! See, my Father, never has a thought offered itself to me with such compelling attraction! Without cease it comes back to me, this thought, each time younger and more alluring! Pink and amorous and blooming, it greets me garlanded with vine and flowers! It kisses me upon the brow! It sets its mouth against mine! It clasps my hand with delicious warmth and murmurs: 'Courage! Go! Go! Deep within this deed, mark me well, you shall discover an unspeakable gratification, a fulfilment, a pride in yourself that nothing else in all the world could offer! Go!' Good! Good, shade of my Father! Good! Good! No more calm for my spirit! I know my duty, I understand it fully, and I shall carry it out! What a strange business the world is! A mere few hours since, if this man's name had been spoken in my hearing, I

would have given ear with goodwill; had I chanced to meet him I would have offered my respects. How many times in life must it not occur that the victim warmly grasps the very hand that wrought his ruin! That the oppressed man and his oppressor, unknown each to the other, give the fraternal kiss; that the unfortunate soul bows with reverence before the very agent of his debasement; that the pauper stands weeping at the carriage door where rides in triumph the son of those who stripped his forebears bare! But not I, my Father! Heaven be praised! All stands revealed before me! I shall not join their ranks! I will track my misery to its very spring, and I will drain it dry! How strange a thing hatred is! It expands the heart so enormously that the earth, boundless for those in love, falls short of space and cannot hold two hearts brimming with such venom!"

Upon ending this obscure appeal to his father's manes,[4] Vengeance, tottering on his feet, pressed his feverish brow to the cold marble and set his lips ardently against the draped escutcheon engraved upon the tomb's lid. As one enamoured might clasp his sweetheart's neck, so he found himself unable to part from that frigid slab.

Eventually, having gained the stable building by a lengthy roundabout route and saddled his palfrey in a trice, he entered noiselessly at a gentle pace an avenue lined with sycamores,

deeply shadowed, at the terminus of which there stood a small low gate that led out onto neglected lands.

Leaping the barrier in one bound, he urged his horse to a gallop, and cleaving the darkness with the rapidity of Wilhelm bearing away Lenore,[5] he was soon lost to sight in the distance, amid the great pools of shadow scattered across the plain.

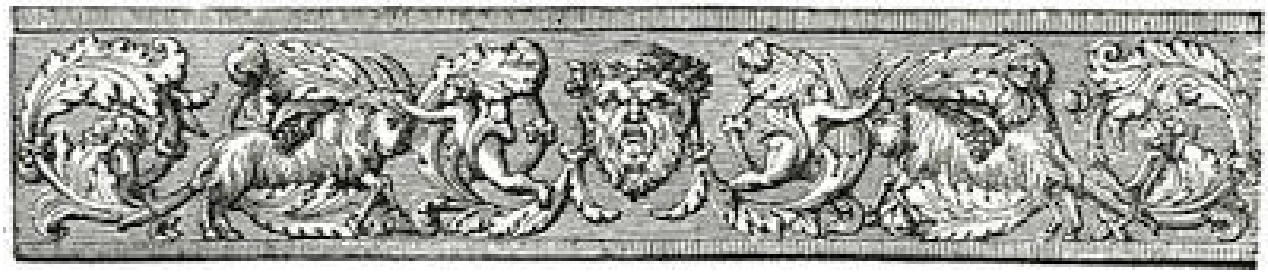
[1] *Cape Misenum and the Bay of Baiae*: Misenum is the promontory at the northern end of the Bay of Naples, from which the Roman fleet was based; Baiae was the most fashionable resort of the ancient Roman world, celebrated for its warm springs and its association with pleasure and excess. The view Borel evokes — from Ischia to Capri to the Neapolitan gulf — is one of the most celebrated panoramas of the Mediterranean, and its invocation here sets Deborah's retrospection against a landscape of lost imperial grandeur.

[2] *Maenad*: in Greek religious tradition, a female votary of Dionysus, associated with ecstatic, frenzied states of possession; the term was used in later literary tradition as a general emblem of a woman in the grip of uncontrolled passion.

[3] *Aspasia* (c. 470–after 428 BC): the celebrated companion of the Athenian statesman Pericles, renowned for her intelligence and political influence; her name became in later usage a byword for a woman of exceptional gifts who nevertheless occupied a socially ambiguous position — neither wife nor ordinary courtesan.

[4] *Manes*: in Roman religious belief, the spirits of the dead, conceived as divine and deserving of reverence; *the manes* of a particular person referred specifically to the shade or spirit of that individual as an object of ritual veneration.

[5] *Wilhelm bearing away Lenore*: a reference to *Lenore* (1773), the celebrated Gothic ballad by the German Romantic poet Gottfried August Bürger, in which the ghost of Wilhelm rides at midnight to carry his betrothed Lenore away to the grave; the poem became one of the most widely translated and imitated works of the Romantic era, and its image of the spectral midnight gallop was familiar across European literature.



XXII.

The moment Vengeance crossed into Paris, day burst upon the night in a single instant, much as one sees it happen in the playhouse; and presently the *dramatis personae* came shuffling out from the wings: Crispin and Sbrigani, Oronte and Mascarille, Chrysalde and Lucinde, Dandin and Dorine, Sganarelle and Scapin,[1] each one taking the stage for the character he was to play. Amidst all those wakeful stage-folk Vengeance swept through as swift and straight as any arrow in flight. Borne forward by the consuming purpose that had seized upon his heart, he pressed on with headlong urgency. He felt within himself a masterful compulsion that meant to have its way. Yet where was that fatal fountain to be found? In what remote dale, what plunging ravine, under what thickly-shadowed bower, beneath what coverlet of living grass, did the venomous wellspring lie waiting for the parched hart to drink his fill? Like one shaken suddenly awake, who clutches his blade and stumbles ahead to

strike down the intruder, even so did Vengeance march, sightless and fierce, his firelock clenched tight. Anger had loaded the weapon, but the quarry was nowhere to be found! Restive lay the steel, fretting in its case, athirst to plough a mortal furrow; but the loathed heart, where did it beat? And would that flesh ever stand before him to be struck?

Passion travels to its destination unschooled and unled! Give it a trinket lost in all the sea, and it would fish it out! For passion, the track of the fleeing prey never fades nor fails. Let passion once take up the chase, and the hare has no certain refuge, the wild swine no lair, the lion himself no hiding-place!

Vengeance learned from the adjutant at the Royal Musketeers' quarters that Monsieur de Villepastour had left the colours when the present reign commenced; nevertheless, were he desirous of locating the gentleman, he might do so at his private establishment in the Rue de l'Université. And there in the Rue de l'Université, the porter informed him that his lordship the Marquis was for the season dwelling at his château in Colombes.[2]

Till then Vengeance could not be sure he was not pursuing wind and shadow, hunting a beast already cold, a fox whose pelt the furrier had purchased and put by: hence when he came to know assuredly that his enemy was yet to be found, when he clutched the thread that would conduct him

unerringly to his hiding-place, something like satisfaction began to sketch itself within his breast. His thoughts grew somewhat calmer, and his frantic haste diminished; for until now he had pressed on as one demented. Possessed now of a certain serenity, as if the work ahead presented no hazard whatever, he postponed his leaving Paris whilst his horse rested and he himself had taken several hours of wholesome slumber.

The sun's inflamed quiver was loosing its fiery bolts upon the earth below, the grasshoppers' click and clatter alone breaking the countryside's mute repose, when Vengeance gained the entrance to that gloomy vault of greenery which ran forward across the open country like a breakwater into the waves, like a culverin thrust beyond the rampart, leading him onward to the château of Colombes: an old castle that had long since exchanged its feudal grimness for the elegance of Louis Quinze, a stone helmet gaily painted, festooned with ribbons, and bursting with blossoms.

Where the avenue began, the wooden paling, tinted the tender green of budding foliage or young fruit, had been left unfastened; at the avenue's conclusion the wrought gate too was standing wide. Vengeance did not scruple to go on; and coming up below the windows of the house, he espied among the garden walks a lady descending a flight of terrace steps, clad in a costume both fashionable and richly appointed. One

hand gathered up the basque[3] of her dress, whilst the other gently plied a fan in the most becoming manner. With stately grace she tilted back her head and shoulders, moving with the gentle motion of a rose that the Zephyr sets nodding, and thrust forward as gracefully as any oarsman his oar that dainty foot which sent ripples through the diaphanous folds of her gown: such a small foot, hardly the measure of a wafer, captive in a slipper of yellow silk cross-cut with sombre stripes, which, built up upon a heel of great height and bent prostrate at the point, brought a leg fit for the gods to their culmination in the sweetest downward curve. In her train walked an attendant, a pretty slip of a maid, breathing in the scent of a rosemary branch and supporting with an air of unconcern, folded across her arm, the unconscionable tail of her lady's dress.

Catching sight of this unforeseen lady of rank, Vengeance altered his course immediately and came riding with haughty grace close to where the terrace stood. There, having alighted and taken his beast by the rein, he doffed his hat and made several bows with all the supreme politeness of a well-bred gentleman, requesting to see Monsieur le Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, whereupon this enchanting creature answered him in the softest tones and with a voice sweet as sugar: "My husband, monsieur, is just now in the park. If you will be pleased to enter the walk facing you, I assure you on

my word you will come upon him." Upon which Vengeance inclined himself afresh by way of acknowledgement. During the whole of this short interview, as they conversed or made their courtesies to each other, they had held each other's gaze steadily, their eyes drawn irresistibly together; there had arisen on either part an involuntary stirring of mutual wonder. One could well believe that the little godling Cupid, that sly imp of an archer, had there and then smitten the pair of them with but a single arrow. Vengeance possessed, as we have seen, all the beauty of some ancient Greek youth! And the Marquise, of lofty bearing, thirty years of age yet altogether youthful still, was no less beautiful herself! Hers was a head of noble grandeur, such as adorns the ancient medals of Syracuse;[4] a neck of such ideal contour it seemed a dream, supple and alive, moving with a sweet undulation; a bosom fit to provoke the jealousy of Juno, and two magnificent suggestions of the breast, though what lay beyond was kept from sight; a stately carriage, ornaments of uncommon richness, a regal amplitude of dress: part queen, part divinity! How should Vengeance have proved immune to such compelling charm, cut so exactly to his measure! Even the most ascetic holy man would have fallen prey! In the end, tearing himself free from the charm that lingered upon him and kept him rooted there despite having obtained his information, he climbed with perfect self-possession onto his fidgeting mount and drove at a hard gallop into the park by way of the alley she had named.

"Célimène," said the Marquise presently to the girl who carried her train, "is he not a magnificent young fellow? Such carriage! Such elegance! Such features! Why, I am all in a flutter!"

The abigail[5] uttered a tiny mocking noise with her mouth, and after a silence that dripped with still more mockery, said: "My heart in my hand, truly, madame, I reckon him an utterly charming shepherd boy. Charming past measure! Why, if he would but deign to offer me doves' nests and bedeck my shepherd's crook with flowers, I should readily suffer him to offer and bedeck me with whatsoever took his fancy."

"Célimène, how sublunary your nature! Nothing can meet your eye without your mind flying directly to the sheets. Lord, I cannot abide that species of low humour! But come now, let us trail this cherub through the park. I require another sight of him, that beauteous angel! Oh, if he will have it so, that exquisite darling, he will see capitulations aplenty!"

As he rounded a turning in a little avenue, Vengeance came across Monsieur le Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, who stood with drawn sword in his hand, giving chase to a butterfly of gorgeous hues that fled terrified ahead of him, flitting and pausing from twig to twig. Some steps ahead a footman stood holding by a silver chain a monkey clad in a

velvet jacket, upon whose neck hung a small fig-basket that the creature was laying waste.

"Monsieur le Marquis, by your leave," exclaimed Vengeance, pulling up his horse with a sharp tug on the reins.

"I am the man, sir. What do you seek?"

Vengeance moved like a lightning-stroke: down from his horse, mantle hurled aside, and his sword ringing free of its sheath. His eye aflame, he advanced directly upon the man:

"Marquis, what I seek," he proclaimed with terrible energy, "what I seek, you wretch, is your life! So, stand to your defence! I stand here in the name of my father and my mother!"

"What do you mean?"

"What I mean, you miserable creature, is this: look hard at me! I am the son of Patrick! Deborah is my mother! And I have come to collect payment for the insults my mother endured, and the blood-debt for my father whom you killed!"

"So this is a family madness, is it, my brave youngster, this belief that Patrick is dead and I his murderer!" said the Marquis then in a fashion thoroughly serene and good-humoured. Then he carried on with nonchalance, creasing a piece of lacework between his fingers: "Ah! You are then, my dear boy, Madame Deborah's son! A most enchanting, a most adored woman, my word! Pray, how is she? Ah, my memory

of her is quite clear! You have something of her about you, but more of your father, sir; in fact, as I observed you a moment ago I said to myself: Good heavens, how remarkable! I have seen that lad before."

"To your guard, sir, do you hear me! Defend yourself, damn you, you wretch!"

"Hold! Easy there! You make a fine show of fury, my sweet! What bee is in your bonnet? Come along to the house; who is to say? I may have a good deal to disclose to you. We can chat in a civilised manner."

"You treat this as a joke, cur! Fight, or you are as good as dead!"

"Dead? I think not. Calmly now. Let us not be hasty."

"Father! Shall I never have an end of this poltroon!"

Vengeance drove his foot into the earth, beat his own brow in fury, and swung his sword with dreadful ferocity.

"Ah! You did not understand, you preening idiot, that one does not insult the child or the woman! Because the woman shall be a mother, because the child shall be a man! To your guard! Again I say it, make your defence!"

"My wretched stripling, what perfect insanity! You mean to die, do you, my dear child, you cannot be thinking clearly? You would force my hand and make me wound you?"

"Die? Myself? By no means, Monsieur le Marquis, I think nothing of the kind. Save your concern, I pray you. Cannot you see that in this business both justice and God fight on my side!"

"God? My dear lad, such a notion would have given Monsieur d'Holbach[6] great entertainment. You really are exquisite!"

Vengeance having launched himself at the Marquis, and there being no means left of putting the matter off, Monsieur de Villepastour, glancing back at his manservant, remarked to him with an air of weary acceptance: "You see how it is, Jasmin; the gentleman leaves me no choice."

Steel met steel, Vengeance coming on like a lion unleashed. The old campaigner was content initially to ward off the strokes with graceful economy; but step by step, provoked by the violence and courage of his unforgiving adversary, he committed himself more deeply to this terrible business and became himself a thing of terror.

There they were engaged, one moment breaking ground, the next closing with thunderous force, when all at once the Marquise appeared in wild alarm at the bend of the alley and, shrieking for them to stop, threw herself bodily between the duelists, seeking to place herself as a shield before Vengeance — which sealed his fate.

A stroke carried too brutally by Monsieur le Marquis, and one he could not moderate in time, worked its way past his adversary's weapon, impaled upon Vengeance's chest the ivory fan the Marquise had been striving to employ as a barrier, pierced straight through his heart, and continued under the arm's full weight until the guard itself pressed against him.

Vengeance staggered back one pace, fixed a lingering gaze upon the Marquise, and crying "O my Mother!" fell dead.

"Monster! You have slain this lovely boy!" screamed Madame de Villepastour with a look of dreadful horror, and let herself drop onto Vengeance's chest, already drenched in his blood.

"Jasmin," remarked Monsieur le Marquis upon this, with no mark whatever of perturbation or unease, "my hand is even better than I thought."

Madame de Villepastour was separated from the body of Vengeance, which she held locked in her arms as torrents of tears fell from her eyes, and escorted to the château by Célimène, where the most devoted ministrations could not bring her back to herself, at the same time that Jasmin, helped by Monsieur de Villepastour, led Vengeance's horse into the thick of a grove, tied it up there, secreted the young man's

body in a tangle of brush, and scraped sand with his boot across the spreading pool of blood.

"This serves for the present, Jasmin. The bell rings; let us go. We shall come back tonight once we have determined what is to be done with this prize."

Come darkness, Monsieur le Marquis and Jasmin duly came back. After pulling the horse out from the grove, they hoisted the body onto the saddle, and having tied it down with reliable cordage, they escorted this woeful conveyance out of the estate by means of a gate that was virtually concealed. There, having struck the horse on either flank with rocks, the creature, snorting at the reek of blood, took fright and galloped away in panic.

Gazing after that mournful cavalcade, Monsieur de Villepastour could not ward off a pang of compunction.

"Poor young man!" he said. "You must admit, Jasmin, he was both beautiful and brave! Truly a young hero, when you think on it!"

"Hero or not, let us go in, Monsieur le Marquis, and bid him Godspeed. Farewell, my fine fellow! That's one traveller, honoured master, who, journeying astride his mule, has no cause to dread losing either his money or his life to bandits."

"Tell me, Jasmin, are you familiar with Mazeppa's story?"[7]

"I am not, master."

"What we have just done puts me in mind of it. I will tell you about it."

Already the horse, far away across the open country, resembled nothing more than a black bird fluttering along a line of turned soil. Master and man withdrew into the castle grounds: the business had gone well; they were well satisfied.

[1] *Crispin, Sbrigani, Oronte, Mascarille, Chrysalde, Lucinde, Dandin, Dorine, Sganarelle, Scapin:* a parade of stock characters drawn from the comedies of Molière — valets, dupes, intriguers, ingénues, pedants, and servants — whose names collectively evoke the whole world of French comic theatre. Their procession through the awakening Paris morning is Borel's way of setting the tragic action of the chapter against the backdrop of a world still absorbed in its own petty theatre.

[2] *Colombes*: a town on the Seine immediately north-west of Paris, now absorbed into the suburban conurbation.

[3] *Basque*: the lower portion of a close-fitting bodice or jacket that extends below the waistline, often cut into tabs or points; a standard feature of fashionable women's dress in the eighteenth century.

[4] *The ancient medals of Syracuse*: the silver coinage of ancient Syracuse, particularly the celebrated *decadrachms* bearing the head of the goddess Arethusa or Persephone, were regarded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as among the finest examples of portrait art from antiquity; the comparison

places the Marquise's profile in the tradition of the most idealised classical beauty.

[5] *Abigail*: a lady's maid or personal attendant; the term derives from the character of Abigail in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* (c. 1616), whose name became generic for the role in English and subsequently in French usage.

[6] *Monsieur d'Holbach:* Paul-Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach (1723–1789), the German-born French philosopher and Encyclopédiste whose *Système de la nature* (1770) presented a thoroughgoing materialist and atheist account of the universe; his Paris salon was the most celebrated gathering-place of freethinking philosophes in the later eighteenth century. Villepastour's invocation of his name signals his own cynical atheism.

[7] *Mazeppa*: Ivan Mazepa (c. 1639–1709), Hetman of the Cossack state, whose legendary punishment — bound naked to a wild horse and sent galloping across the steppe — became one of the great Romantic images of the early nineteenth century, inspiring poems by Byron and Hugo and a painting by Géricault.

XXIII.

When first I addressed myself to the composition of this book, my faculties were steeped in scepticism, in blank denial, in every species of fallacy; I proposed to install upon the throne nothing better than a lie, to crown a usurper! Much as the common people, liable to fits of lunacy, will on occasion crown with the imperial circlet some contemptible head better suited to bear the executioner's fleur-de-lys scorched in with branding iron, I meant to encircle a blameworthy idea with the consecrated chaplet, to invest it with imperial purple, to shed upon its brow the sanctifying unguents, to lift it aloft on the battle-shield or at the altar's foot, to name it Caesar or Jupiter, and to display it before the adoring throng, which hungers less for bread than for false gods, false kings, false doctrines, insubstantial shadows! Yet through some operation I am unable to fathom, illumination came to me along the way. The

frozen film which shrouded my casement, leaving it no more transparent than a thick web of gauze, dissolved under beams that came from on high, and let through to me a more luminous day. Where all had been thick and muddied, there opened to my sight a pellucid current. I peered through the bulrushes straight down upon a bed of gravel most pure, crossed and recrossed by the fugitive shadows of silver-sided fish gliding between the currents like a shaft released, like a ship carrying every stitch of sail, like a shuttle running to and fro without pause from the right hand to the left, from the left hand to the right, in the loom of the sea-god. The mist was riven asunder, and at the far end of the fissure torn in that shroud of vapour, I beheld the summit of the heights, resembling a colossal panoply turned to gold by the sun's fire. I looked through the veil of that seething mist, and at length there appeared before me in perfect beauty the town set upon the eminence and the forest outspread in the plain below, both of which the mist had long concealed from me.

Yes! a Fate there is!

Yes! a guiding Providence there is, both for the human race and for each mortal being!

No! the vicious do not prevail here below!

No, in this world every soul is paid according to its works.

No, we need no future world to repair the wrongs of this one, to award the honest man his desert and award afresh the desert of the scoundrel.

Here below, nothing is left unavenged!

No, in the government of creation there is no confusion!

No, the righteous are not made to settle the accounts of the unrighteous, nor goodness those of sin!

No, human beings are not made prey to one another without God's design standing behind it.

Good men in distress are good in seeming alone, or should they be good in truth — for the offspring of the vicious may yet be just — it is because they are making expiation for the faults of their blood.

Yes, expiation is a truth I hold!

No, the primal doom fixed upon us is not an abomination! It is a law most exalted!

God is a God of vengeance!

Divine vengeance may work unseen, may tarry and seem to postpone its hour, but come it surely will! God has the whole reach of existence spread before Him; nothing forces His pace; nothing requires that He should punish the violator in himself instead of in the progeny that shall come forth from his side.

We, whose span is but a single day, lose all hope of retribution if it lies not within reach of our brief and brittle blade! But the deathless sword of God lets nothing slip away!

I grant you, this belief is a fearful one! Be it so! Better still! Let it track the gratified sinner to the midst of his so-called delights, let it drill into his chest with its metal point, let it force its way deeper still, and make the heart itself run dry!

Truth is as an unbowed sapling, stiff beyond all bending, which no force existing can make supple, and which will never submit to being curved! It is a mass of stone that comes crashing down on those who would push it aside!

All through this volume I have done my utmost to bring vice into flower, to let depravity triumph over righteousness; I have decked out decay with roses; I have made cowardice sweet with costly perfume; I have filled the bosom of disgrace with happiness overflowing; I have thrust the starry vault down into the mire; I have lifted filth up into the sky; there is not one among my noble heroes who does not end a victim; at every turn I have displayed evil as the tyrant and goodness as the downtrodden. And there it is: all that accumulation of merciless fortunes has concluded, after such pains taken, merely in refuting my purpose!

Does not Lord Cockermouth, vile of spirit, and possibly sprung from a spirit viler still, atone for his transgressions in

himself and in his race? Retribution strikes him in his very self. Through his wife he is made to suffer. In his daughter he pays the price. His worldly goods fall to pieces, and he lives to see the downfall of his family. God's avenging hand chases him through his offspring, and halts only when all has been wiped out.

Lady Cockermouth, that tender dove coupled to an ox — hers was an honest nature, but she must needs atone for her father, a man of trade who had pushed his way upward. Sirs, you know perfectly whether honest folk are those who get ahead!

And what of Deborah! She stood as the ultimate reckoning of a lineage twice damned, which we have just watched expire in the shape of Vengeance, her young child, a creature sprung from two blighted families. For Patrick, stretched as we see him upon the most pitiless instrument of torture, comes of an old house brought low following popular uprisings during which that seditious house doubtless had a hand in more than one crime.

In the case of Fitz-Harris, even if the sole charge laid at his door were his treason towards his friend, towards his brother Patrick — treachery being the most heinous of all sins in the sight of God — he would have reaped no more than his proper reward.

You whom my deceptive arguments gratified, hushed to sleep, made much of, offered consolation! You who felt such absurd jubilation when you beheld me leading wickedness in triumph through the streets; who could gaze with satisfaction upon the misery of whatever is virtuous, since all virtue is shown suffering in my work, and who managed to share my belief, if only briefly, in a fate that sees nothing, in crimes that go unavenged! Crush that soothing fiction under your heels! Bury your ghastly face in your tainted hands! Tremble! I say, tremble! For the time is coming when all these afflictions I have sung of, along with heaped masses of more, will tip the scale of God's wrath! For even now the Almighty is fanning the flames of chastisement as a smith fans the blaze in his smithy! For the time for enormous expiation is going to sound on a funereal chime, terrifying, fearsome, hideous! For the Lord and the common folk, those two fearsome workers, will shortly turn their hands to the job! And their labour, even as they are, shall be fearsome!

Monarchy must count out to God, at tedious length, every one of its orgies! And its hirelings! The people shall twist them in its mighty grasp as one twists a tattered cloth!

Not a single hidden complaint, not a single tear shed in shadow, not a single suppressed groan, not a single bead of blood that God does not collect, and measure, and repay! Each one is a particle of powder heaping up behind the ball,

and they combine to make the report so much louder, so much more dreadful when the explosion comes! It is from such trifling and scattered sources that the ruin of empires proceeds.

When these cataclysms occur, the Lord fells Hercules with the brute's own mace. He then splits the nations in two: upon one part He bestows a woolly coat, upon the other He bestows jaws, and He stirs up these camps in mutual enmity until the camp bearing the jaws has wholly devoured the camp bearing nothing but fleece!

When expiation has been carried through to the end, and God finds His implement no longer necessary, He smashes it to pieces!

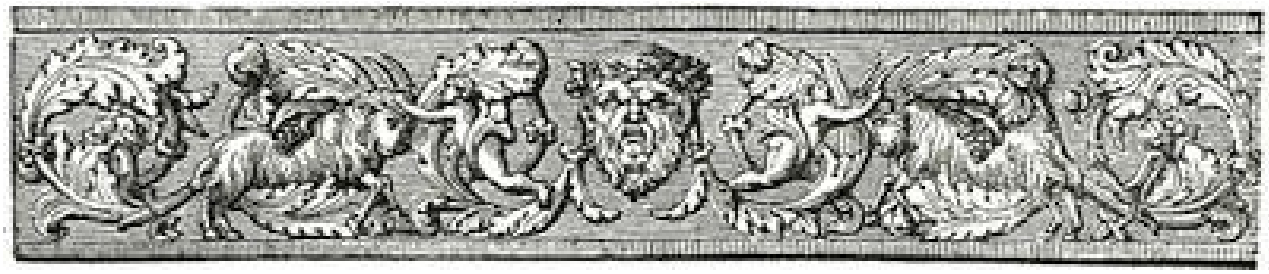
Before long the Lord will put the people to work; but once that implement is blunted in His grasp and crimsoned with blood, He will throw it aside!

Then He will dispatch a man sprung from no one knows what origin, who shall cleanse blood by means of blood, who will snatch infants from their mothers the moment they are born and brain them on the hard stone![1] After that, this implement likewise will be smashed! Thereupon the ultimate remnants of a race fated to disappear from the earth will emerge once more. But God, to complete the holocaust, will a second time pick out a tool from the very family of that

doomed line, and will set this last tool to rule the populace until the people have atoned for their latest villainies and their latest perfidy — a creature with clawed hands wielding pincers as its rod of office, an enormous marine crayfish, a great lobster possessing no blood coursing through it, only an armoured casing the hue of shed blood![2]

[1] *A man sprung from no one knows what origin... who will snatch infants from their mothers:* Borel's veiled figure for Napoleon Bonaparte — the man of obscure Corsican origin who rose through the Revolution to empire, and whose continental wars swept up an entire generation of young men from their families. The image of braining infants on hard stone is a biblical inversion of Psalm 137 (*Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones*), here applied to the devouring of France's youth by war.

[2] *A great lobster possessing no blood... only an armoured casing the hue of shed blood*: Borel's figure for the Bourbon Restoration — specifically Charles X and the ultra-royalist regime of the 1820s and 1830s, against which *Madame Putiphar* was in part a protest. The lobster's red armour without warm blood is a savage emblem of a dynasty that returned wearing the colour of the Revolution's blood without having earned it; its claws and pincers figure the renewed instruments of censorship and repression. Borel is writing in 1839, less than a decade after the July Revolution of 1830 that overthrew Charles X.



XXIV.

Once the cup of Divine anger is brimming, a single tear from a woman's eye, and it spills over!

Don Rodrigo the King forced himself upon Florinda, and Spain was lost to him![1]

Pharaoh forced himself upon Deborah, and thereby forfeited France!

Not that the Almighty ever decides to obliterate a kingdom because of one solitary transgression; but when a nation has sunk to such depths of shame that it finds itself governed by a man who either perpetrates villainy himself or orchestrates it through others, then the hour has struck to bring down the axe!

Florinda turned to her father in her distress, and her vengeful outcry striking a terrible chord in the heart of Count Julian, that nobleman, carried beyond reason by desperate care for his family's honour, called in the Moors and in his

treachery surrendered to them the very fortress-keys of his fatherland!

But Deborah acted with more sense than Florinda, that Cava! — for so the Moors in their own tongue dubbed her, which is to say the Vicious! — and, as we have seen for ourselves, she placed her trust solely in the people and in the Almighty! Men calling themselves philosophers had already appeared on the scene, and the people were already lapping up hungrily the toxin that oozed from them; France, crouched then upon her rear like some ravenous creature, was already nosing about in her own bowels and gnawing at her own heart!

That was how there came to an end in France, and likewise in Spain, the ascendancy of those Gothic rulers — *de los Godos*![2]

Alas! At the ominous moment when we see our little vessel coming to shore, looking like King Don Rodrigo after the carnage of battle, thrust out from her kingly tent, isolated and lamentable, so thoroughly crushed that she had ceased to feel anything, perishing of hunger and of thirst, so covered in blood that she resembled a blazing fire, clad in armour dented and fractured that once had sparkled with gemstones, wielding a sword hacked into the semblance of a saw by the strokes rained upon it, a helmet shattered and sunk deep into her head, her countenance thick with dust — the very image

of her fortunes reduced to ashes — astride her horse Orelia, haggard and broken, scarcely able to maintain his shallow panting breath, his lips occasionally meeting the ground, MONARCHY wandered across the open country of Xerez,[3] a second Gilboa[4] steeped in tears! She was in flight with tragic visions swimming before her, with terror pounding in her ears and a tremendous clamour of battle all confused; terrified of all, alarmed by all, at a loss as to where she should point her gaze: turn it skyward, the sky was charged with fury! direct it to the ground, the ground was hers no more, it had been trampled under, it had been made foreign! sink it into her own heart, into her past, into her spirit: there she found a battlefield more terrible yet!

With her head pounding from the agony she suffered, she too, in imitation of King Don Rodrigo, climbed as evening approached to the crest of the hill; and standing there, searching for her routed men, her colours, her fallen ensigns lying strewn upon the ground and buried in the dirt, her captains who had fled or fallen, her camp drenched in blood that coursed along in brooks, saddened by the vision of such devastation, possessed entirely by her profound sorrow, tears pouring from her eyes, she cried aloud as he had cried:

"A day ago I was queen of an entire realm, now I have not even a hamlet! But yesterday towns and fortresses, now nothing at all! Yesterday servants in plenty, today not a soul!

Now there is not one castle merlon I can say is mine! May the hour be damned when I drew my first breath, when such an immense lordship fell to me, now that I have thrown it away, now that I have lost the whole in the space of a day! O unhappy wretch! Had you acted thus in other days, had you run from your lusts with the speed at which you now go! Had you not shown, when passion stormed your walls, a spinelessness unbecoming to a Goth, and doubly unbecoming to a queen who rules, France would still be rejoicing in her greatness! And in that dreadful force which there upon the soil lies fallen and alters the colour of the turf! May the moment and the hour be damned when my lot placed me in this world! You breasts that nursed me, why not the tomb rather than your milk! O my foes! O you avengers whom God employs! Oh, stab me to death with your daggers, and it will be a good deed! But the betrayer is faint-hearted, never once does he do what is right!"

When Orelia her horse had tumbled down lifeless, she found herself stretched out between its limbs, and just as King Don Rodrigo had done, whilst she waited for the night's gloom to dissolve, she made herself a headrest from her saddle-bows, uttering these words: *Adios, España, que el barbaro señorea*![5]... Adieu, France, over whom savagery now reigns!

There, close to her dear Orelia, she waited in this fashion for the hostile dawn.

And then, as with King Don Rodrigo, who sealed himself alive inside his tomb, the viper of conscience ate away at her, and in the extremity of her torture — her heart supplying liquid to her weeping eyes, her eyes supplying her mouth which drank down the tears — she cried out in his very words:

"Sink your fangs, serpent! Make an end of me! Let me see the face of death! Alas! My shame shall last forever! The world's memory will fix me as depraved, just as it fixes others as worthy! Oh! Would that fame, memory, the world itself, might be struck dumb! Would that the record-keepers might be sightless, so that none of this should be set down in writing! Oh! If only my days were done! Oh! If only death would come! Yet I think I am so vile that death itself will not have me! And yet my breathing is growing faint! And yet my teeth are grinding tight! And yet my tongue, lifeless and lolling, shoots forth its tip! Sink your fangs, serpent! Make an end of me! Let me see the face of death!"

[1] *Florinda la Cava and Don Rodrigo*: Florinda la Cava is a legendary figure in medieval Spanish tradition, said to be the daughter of Count Julian, dishonoured by the last Visigothic king Roderic (Don Rodrigo); her father's betrayal — calling in the Umayyad forces — is held in the legend to have opened the way for the Muslim conquest of Iberia in 711. Historians are agreed she is a literary rather than historical figure, but the legend exercised an enormous hold on Spanish and European Romantic literature, appearing in chronicles, ballads, epic poems by Southey and others, and Walter Scott's *Vision of Don Roderick* (1811).

[2] *De los Godos*: Spanish, "of the Goths" — the Visigothic dynasty whose rule over Spain ended with the conquest of 711. Borel draws a sustained parallel between the fall of the Visigothic kingdom through royal vice and the fall of the French monarchy through the same cause.

[3] *Xerez*: the town of Jerez de la Frontera in Andalusia, near which the decisive battle of Guadalete was fought in 711, at which Roderic's forces were destroyed by the Umayyad army under Tariq ibn Ziyad.

[4] *Gilboa*: the mountain in northern Israel at whose foot King Saul and his sons were defeated and killed by the Philistines (2 Samuel 1:21); David's lament over Gilboa — "Let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, ye mountains of Gilboa" — made it a byword for a field of irreversible military and dynastic disaster.

[5] *Adios, España, que el barbaro señorea!:* Spanish, "Farewell, Spain, over whom the barbarian now holds sway!"

XXV.

The ending of Fitz-Harris, so full of suffering there in the pit, following one-and-twenty months of struggle against death itself, following an agony both piercing and tenacious; the deprivation of this fellow sufferer, this friend from infancy and through all their shared desolation, and to crown it all the utter futility of M. de Malesherbes's explicit assurance, an assurance which appeared only to have fanned the faint flame of his expectation that M. le Chevalier de Rougemont might blow it out under his nose with all his wonted insolence and savagery; the lengthening of his confinement, which now offered naught but the semblance of a mortal and arid waste without bound or horizon; all of this, every bitter draught, every odious manoeuvre, every profound grief had finally accomplished what we have seen: Patrick's reason, which hitherto had remained constantly elevated, noble and proud, which hitherto had stood like a robust mast never swaying for an

instant through the most dismal storms and calamities, was at last shaken.

When he was translated from the Keep to the Bastille, the ultimate shock fell. The blow was severe, a terrible disillusionment for Patrick's spirit, which had yet again laid itself open in simple faith to the prospect of release, for the soul of the unfortunate is ever disposed, like the hawk, to swoop down upon the grossest of lures; when in place of the freedom that had just been dangled before him without warning, he discovered himself anew enclosed by walls and under the vault of a new pit.

Throughout the nine concluding years of his confinement in the Keep, Patrick had existed in the most spiritless and melancholy frame of mind conceivable, plunged deep in God and plunged deep in prayer. Even this profound piety grew more excessive. At that point he broke off completely every connexion with his fellow men. Turning a deaf ear to all enquiry, putting forward no petition, denying himself strictly any utterance, he communed henceforth with Heaven alone. Kneeling or squatting, coiled as one might describe it around his crucifix, he dwelt continually in the mournful immobility of some benumbed dormouse. Should he be forced to quit his dungeon to breathe somewhat upon the tower terraces, he took his seat gloomily on a gun carriage and thenceforth refused to move. Now and then, having

traced with his eyes for many minutes a wild dove soaring free in the upper air, his heart grew full and he would fall to weeping. So real and so urgent was the want he then felt in his heart for solitude and obscurity that he would not speak even to God except in the dialect of his beloved and ill-fated country, as if the tongue spoken around him had been altogether forgotten. *"O thiarna,"* he would oft intone, prostrating himself against the ground, "*déan tróchaire ormsa mórpheacach*!"[1]

To be sure, Heaven had endowed Patrick with a resolute soul and a firm mind; yet he had been so abundantly watered with sorrows, so thoroughly depleted by sufferings. Alas, who among us would not have sunk as he had done under the weight of like suffering and the terror of a prison without end! To think of it — O Lord, the thought alone causes my blood to congeal in my veins — that at this very hour there had been five-and-twenty years, ten months and eleven days during which Patrick, severed from the world, from liberty, from his love, had been weighed down with fetters and had made his dwelling in the deadly gloom of dungeons!

Pitiful martyr!

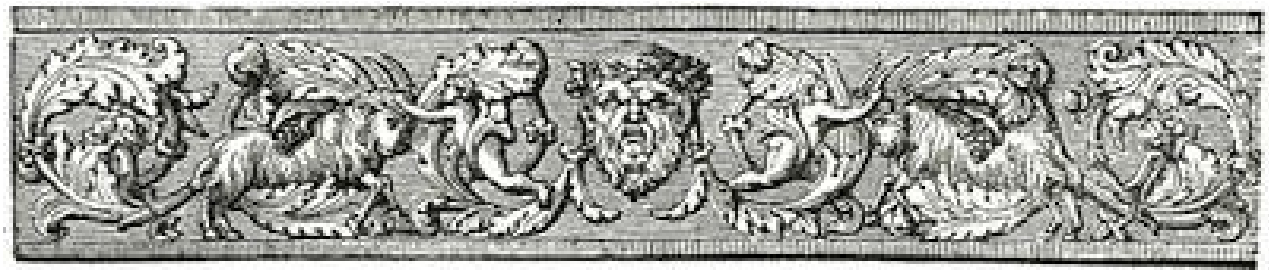
But whilst Patrick was expiring in such quietude and a silence as of the tomb prevailed in the bowels of his dungeon, mighty rumours were swelling in the world outside. A whole nation was in agitation like some great army; an

entire populace spoke and made itself intoxicated with the clamour of its own speech; and in its frenzy and its besottedness, this slavish mob was shrieking: "Our shepherds are as woolly as we! Let us fetch scissors! What if we gave our shepherds a bit of shearing!"

Forbearance! A matter of days now. And when we sink our pail into the well, it shall return to us laden with blood!

And when we search for a stone whereon to repose our head, or for our old father to steer him through the gloom, our hand shall meet with naught but breasts torn open and heads struck off!

[1] *O thiarna, déan tróchaire ormsa mórpheacach!*: Irish, "O Lord, have mercy on me, a great sinner!" — an echo of the *Kyrie eleison* of the Latin Mass and of the prayer of the publican in Luke 18:13 (*God, be merciful to me a sinner*), here spoken in Patrick's mother tongue as the last language left to him, the tongue of his childhood and his lost country.



XXVI.

So the time of chastisement was at hand!

Oh, I implore you, stand with me, my brethren, and believe in expiation! Believe in a God who visits punishment upon this earth! Without such faith, alas, nothing has its justification, nothing has its rule. The world is then merely an unending sack and ruin; Mankind merely a detestable and inscrutable jumble; society a cut-throat den, and the earth a craven conspirator.

Without such faith, everything persists in obscurity, secrecy, darkness, infamy, wretchedness! Life is then merely a puzzle lacking its key, a faulty conundrum, a laughable and impossible charade! All things take on a ludicrous and preposterous character, from the meanest concerns right up to the mightiest, from the lone affliction of the common man to the crashing downfall of empires.

Deprived of this belief in expiation, which puts into our hands the key to every arcanum, one slides imperceptibly into the most farcical deductions, the most risible inductions, the most fantastical lunacies; one comes, by way of illustration, as does a certain intelligence of this age who might nearly be considered thoughtful, as does M. Thiers[1] in a word, to ascribe to one of the supreme events in human chronicle, to the French Revolution that is to say, as its direct cause and source, a variety of shabby quip tossed off flippantly by some minor counsellor of the Parlement, a rabble-rouser, a windbag, a small-time nobleman whose name possessed not even a fixed spelling, M. d'Espré... or d'Eprémesnil,[2] a wretched windbag I repeat, a pestilence, a blight, for the windbag is the direst of calamities, a buffoon masquerading in judicial robes, a puppet, who in His Majesty's stables ought to have been whipped with his bare buttocks exposed beneath his gown!

I am no man of eminence, I am neither grave nor weighty; I covet neither the reins of government, nor the daughters of those who gather the salt duties, nor the trumpet of Clio;[3] I am but a modest romancer, not the smallest degree more! Yet I acknowledge all the same that if ever it had been within the bounds of possibility for a quip to have occasioned some happening, some upheaval, I would

not have desired for any consideration to set myself up as its chronicler!

Sixteen volumes devoted to the results of a jest, no, never in life! I have too keen a sense of what I owe to my own dignity!

Io soy que soy![4] As one from Castile might put it.

[1] M. Thiers: Adolphe Thiers (1797–1877), historian and politician, whose *Histoire de la Révolution française* (10 volumes, 1823–1827) was the most widely read account of the Revolution in Borel's day; Thiers would later become the first President of the Third Republic. Borel's contempt for his explanatory framework — finding petty parliamentary squabbles rather than providential necessity at the Revolution's root — is consistent with his broader insistence on expiation as history's governing principle.

[2] M. d'Eprémesnil: Jean-Jacques Duval d'Eprémesnil (1745–1794), counsellor in the Parlement of Paris, celebrated in the 1780s for his theatrical defiance of royal authority and his inflammatory speeches; he was guillotined during the Terror. Borel mimics the uncertainty over the correct spelling of his name — d'Espréménil, d'Eprémesnil, d'Eprémesnil — as part of his dismissal of the man's historical significance.

[3] *The trumpet of Clio*: Clio is the Muse of history in Greek mythology; her attribute is a scroll or, in later tradition, a

trumpet proclaiming great deeds. Borel disclaims any ambition to be a historian in the grand official manner.

[4] *Io soy que soy!*: Spanish, "I am what I am!" — a phrase with both colloquial and theological resonances; in its highest register it echoes the divine name revealed to Moses (*I am that I am*, Exodus 3:14), here deployed by Borel with characteristic swagger as a declaration of his own irreducible literary identity.

XXVII.

At the far end of an old rampart which formerly defended Paris, and which by degrees, finding itself encompassed by the city, had grown emasculated in its bosom, in the bosom of this mistress of the world, as Hercules did of old at the feet of the Lydian queen,[1] and which like Hercules had permitted its Omphale to divest it of its club and its lion's hide; at the terminus of this aged boulevard, I repeat, grown similar today to some cradle-rocker who warbles in the sun and turns her spinning wheel, there loomed an immense prison of stone with which we have earlier formed an acquaintance, ghastly and gloomy, gap-toothed, noisome and crumbling, which with begrimed countenance, with a witless expression, unmoving, with little crooked eyes fitted with iron lashes and which seemed to have been pierced by a gimlet, stared unblinkingly about like some half-rotten cayman in the ooze of a swamp, breathing pestilent vapours and hungering for prey. Here stood a

survival from times long past, which seemed to persist there erect like some aged creature who had declined his grave so as to devour his own lineage. What was this thing? Upon hearing that name, there flow immediately into our thoughts the clanking of chains and the sound of lamentations, followed by the tumult of battle and shouts of victory. This was a spot of execrable fame! It was the Bastille!

This refuge of evil, which had lent its power to such a multitude of wrongs, which had been implicated in such a host of villainies, which had swallowed such floods of tears and such profuse sweat of torment, had become the focus of popular abhorrence. This axe forever poised above the heads of the guiltless, ever prepared to strike down, filled the breast with hate and terror. The people regarded this prison only with fright: to them it stood as the mouth of Hades. None ventured to skirt these ramparts without dread, as if the walls had invisible tentacles with which to pull people in, as if they yawned wide.

A scapegoat charged with the injuries and villainies of threescore kings, such mountains of wrath had piled themselves upon this beast and gave it chase that it was reaching at length its final hour. The *cahiers*[2] entreated the Estates for its pulling down. The people had sworn to bring about its end!

For close upon a year already Paris, the whole of France in truth, had been seething with anxiety and disquiet. The earth was in motion beneath, cracking apart and groaning like the crown of a volcano on the verge of explosion. The multitude, goaded by whispers of an ostensibly deeper penury, by whispers of a counterfeit famine and by other whispers more tenebrous and more terrible besides, was making itself progressively more restive and unmanageable. Its shackle burst and its muzzle ripped loose trailing from its neck, it stalked without respite day and night like a mastiff broken free, or like a wolf from the wastes, hunting for the site of slaughter to make merry in gore.

What perfected the depravation of the people, however, was the contemptible show they were given at the Estates of Versailles, where their deputies knocked about and came to grips without shame among themselves and with their superiors, pulling and hauling like Pasquin and Marforio,[3] like a pair of scoundrels. Alas, this pitiful display had made plain to it at once that his king was nothing more than a piece of timber; that every king is but a timber once one sets oneself up as carpenter, takes up his compass and his axe, and, something yet more ruinous, that a man of quality is not as strong as one who carries burdens for his living.

The opposing camps drenched each other without pause in a flood of speech. Court and commons tattled and took

umbrage like two loquacious old biddies, like two petty officials, like two chattering jays. They were passing one another through the blade of speechifying. Miserable thing, for that is just what the people loathe!

In the end the Almighty, deeming doubtless His instrument sufficiently tempered and honed, firmly mounted it upon its handle and set it to its business.

When a nation turns upon its divinities, the first thing it does is break their idols; when it rears up against its rulers, the first thing it does is break their emblems. Well then, the Bastille standing as the most evident emblem of a tyranny both old and detested, the populace naturally could not but tell itself: *Let us tear down this hideous symbol in the same manner we strike out the heraldry on carriage doors and the escutcheons chiselled into the stone of noble dwellings.*

Thus on July the fourteenth, while the usual tug-of-war proceeded at Versailles, the morning light promising a glorious day, the people, who had already put their forces to the proof, who had already acquired the habit of staring death down, who already understood how a blade sinks in, stood up with valour, glanced round about, turned back its sleeves; then cried aloud: "The time has come at last, for heaven stands our friend! Ho, brothers! To arms!"

And having no wish themselves to engage in speechifying, hardly had they ended this cry before they rushed to the Invalides.[4] There they possessed themselves of every weapon of war that lay rusting in that place, and when they beheld swords gripped in their fists, they waved them aloft in gladness and wrath, and went to range themselves beneath the walls of the Bastille.

Viewed from the heights of that antique pile, what an odd army to see this mob must have been, made up of such varied ingredients; this jumble of men from all trades and all kinds, arrayed in the most grotesque equipage. Boys bore swords that rose a cubit above their heads; law clerks were drawing taut crossbows; draymen were making carbines ring out instead of whips; abbots, women and religious were drilling themselves with muskets; and since on the preceding day the Garde-Meuble[5] had been ransacked, here one beheld a ship-salvager sporting a thigh-piece on his arm; there a peruke-maker vanishing beneath the casque of Charles IX; yonder a peddler of second-hand goods gotten up in the full panoply of François I, or a bricklayer, drenched in wine and sweat, encased in the majestic armour of Bayard.[6]

At the view of this outlandish saturnalia,[7] alas, what pensive spirit would not have succumbed to sombre and fathomless revery?

[1] *Hercules at the feet of the Lydian queen*: in classical mythology, Hercules was sold into slavery to Omphale, Queen of Lydia, as atonement for a murder; she compelled him to dress in women's clothing and spin wool while she wore his lion's skin and carried his club. The image of the great warrior unmanned by his mistress became a standard emblem of strength degraded by subjection.

[2] *Cahiers*: the *cahiers de doléances* — registers of grievances compiled by each of the three estates prior to the meeting of the Estates-General in May 1789. These documents recorded the complaints and reform demands of clergy, nobility, and commons from parishes across France; many included explicit calls for the demolition of the Bastille, and they became one of the most remarkable expressions of popular will in European history.

[3] *Pasquin and Marforio*: two ancient statues in Rome, on which anonymous satirical verses and dialogues had been posted since the sixteenth century; "Pasquin" would speak and "Marforio" reply, creating the effect of a public disputation between rival wits. The practice gave the word *pasquinade* to European languages as a term for lampoon and public

mockery. Borel invokes them to suggest that the Estates-General had descended to undignified street-level squabbling.

[4] *The Invalides*: the Hôtel des Invalides, built by Louis XIV as a hospital and residence for aged soldiers; by 1789 it also served as a military depot. On the morning of 14 July, the Parisian crowd seized approximately 28,000 muskets and several cannon from its stores before marching on the Bastille, though they still lacked gunpowder, which they hoped to find at the fortress.

[5] *The Garde-Meuble*: the royal repository of furniture, furnishings, and state treasures, housed in a building on the Place Louis XV (now the Place de la Concorde); on 13 July 1789 it was ransacked by the crowd, who made off with armour, weapons, and ornamental pieces — hence the motley armament described in the passage that follows.

[6] *Bayard*: Pierre Terrail, Seigneur de Bayard (c. 1473–1524), the legendary French knight known as *le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche* — "the knight without fear and beyond reproach" — a byword for chivalric honour and martial virtue. The image of a drunken bricklayer encased in Bayard's armour is one of Borel's finest comic-historical strokes.

[7] *Saturnalia*: the great Roman winter festival in honour of Saturn, marked by feasting, role reversals between masters and servants, and a temporary suspension of social hierarchy; it became in later European usage a byword for licensed disorder and the world turned upside down.

XXVIII.

Once the multitude, their slings ready like that of young David, had remained some time in the giant's presence, they were swept up by that ardour which was ever natural to them; and in their turbulent haste to enter promptly upon the business, they imperiously required that their enemy be surrendered to them on the instant — meaning thereby the yielding up of arms and place together.

Now the governor was no coward. With him he had a reinforcement of thirty-two little Swiss guards despatched to him in secrecy the night before, along with three score invalids and four cannoneers. You will readily conceive what sort of reply he was disposed to make. He knew well enough that Turenne and Condé[1] had once pronounced these defences impregnable, and in any case, as the Court, having drawn together considerable military strength at the very gates of Paris, fully purposed to launch a fearsome camisado[2] in the

night between the fifteenth and sixteenth, the whole business came down to winning a few hours' delay.

The populace, deeply affronted by the foreign and French troops so insolently encamped under their noses, and having caught the scent of hidden plots and of the blow that was in preparation, were in no humour to entertain any form of parley. Time pressed heavily upon them. Accordingly, as soon as they possessed reasonable assurance that nothing would be yielded them except what they could tear away with their bare hands, they joined battle.

The first assault came from the Rue Saint-Antoine.

The mob having taken possession of the forward courts, a few daring fellows pressed through into the Governor's own precinct. But now, driven to desperation and at last seizing upon the gage of battle cast at his feet, the governor ordered the outer drawbridge to be jerked upward and struck back with a withering discharge of musketry. Blood now ran in streams.

First struck with alarm, then roused to rage, the throng multiplied unremittingly. From all directions came ammunition, arms, and fighting men. Whole sections of the faubourgs came streaming in. Those guns captured at the Hôtel des Invalides reached the fortress, after passing through the town in a blaze of triumph. Aged campaigners, naval

troops, guardsmen, and deserters who had been mixed up in the popular movement for several days past now grasped the reins of command, managed the siege operations, and trained the guns. They placed cannon at the edge of the ditch; assault was made by way of the Arsenal gardens; men pressed into the Powder yard, made their way across, and came again face to face with the outer drawbridge; they stormed the guardroom and the lodgings of the invalids, and the combat raged on with savage fury.

At the crash of arms and the reports of such butchery, the word-mongers grew pale; and eager to supplant this savage struggle with a battle of speeches, they sent one deputation after another to parley. But engulfed in the chaos and scrimmage, these orators might thrash about and make what display of themselves they would — neither those within nor those without remarked them in the least, and their oratory was lost in the din of musket-fire. As early as morning, before so much as a single blow had fallen, an elector from the district of Saint-Louis-de-la-Culture, a Monsieur Thuriot[3] by name, had arrived to press his suit with the governor and make ceremonious gestures atop the battlements in sight of all the people.

The artillery crews hammered at the drawbridge, after futile attempts had been made to hack through its chains with axes. The governor, on his side — did he bring his guns into

play? I know not, but of this there can be no doubt: the ordnance boomed without cessation, making the town and the soil tremble, growling through the heavens and hurling terror both close at hand and far afield.

They had been at grips for three hours already, and upwards of three hundred dead bodies were gnawing the dust; the wounded were borne away from all quarters; yet the people, so far from losing heart, although no opening yet presented itself and all circumstances warned against hope of triumph, waxed ever more fearsome. Posted in concealment at every point, from casements and housetops a thousand sharpshooters aimed with cool deliberation; and no sooner did one of the besieged appear through the embrasures or atop the turrets than he was brought down by the torrent of their fire. Just then a piece of wartime cunning came most conveniently to aid the assailants and screen their tactical movements. Two waggons laden with forage were upset and put to the torch, and the heavy smoke which the wind carried towards the fortress wholly blinded those within.

Finally, yielding to the battering of the guns, the outer drawbridge came crashing down, and amidst shouts of triumph and howls of rage and vengeance the crowd surged forth, like floodwaters bursting their levees, into the court of the Governorship. Upon that ground, at sight of the fallen who had been first to perish in the war, their rage mounted

higher still; they unleashed their fury upon the stonework, they set the governor's quarters ablaze; yet so dazzling was the sun, so magnificent the daylight, that this burning, which in the midst of black night would have sent forth mighty flames, threw up barely a faint shimmer.

Of a sudden a young maiden came into sight. The word went round that she was the governor's child; she was instantly grasped. She was placed upon a heap of straw to which fire was applied, and they threatened to burn her alive there in her father's presence if he delayed the surrender a moment more. But in that same instant an elderly man, a certain Monsieur de Monsigny, the actual father of this hapless girl, leaned out to call to her, and urged by frantic despair, even as he made to throw himself from the battlements' height, a musket-ball found him and he tumbled lifeless into the fosse; meanwhile a gallant soul, who had previously rescued the unfortunate young woman once already, snatched her from the hands of those who would murder her, bore her off, placed her somewhere safe, then rushed back to join the fighting.

The guns, directed afresh against the inner drawbridge, maintained a fearful bombardment and were breaking it apart.

Seeing he could hold no longer and that he had let fall the station his King had confided to his charge, the disconsolate governor made to explode his fortress, and had

already come close, match aflame, to twenty thousand pounds of gunpowder, when a few craven troops seized him and stood in the way of this dreadful deed.

Amidst these happenings, the small postern that lay at the terminus of the lesser bridge, affording entry into the fortress proper, opened slightly and without noise — but on whose orders? It was impossible to tell.

Several daring men launched themselves forward in an instant. The throng poured in behind them, trampled down whatever opposed them, struck with pitiless fury, and finally broke into the very belly of the beast. Hence those cowardly souls who had in secret eased the door open were the first to fall, and claimed at once the reward their contemptible treachery had earned.

The chief drawbridge dropped, and the mob poured forth into the interior court. Men were smothered, trodden underfoot in the stairwells, the hallways, the towers; they mistook friend for foe, slew one another, cut one another's throats! A dreadful carnage reached its culmination!

Alas! Experience has taught us well that in civil strife and fighting through the streets, one has far more to dread from the weapons of one's own fellows than from those of the enemy.

Upon the heights of the Tower of the Comté and that of the Bazinière[4], a few triumphant figures already made their appearance and raised their standards, greeted by the applause of the enormous crowd following their progress from the ground.

While some were beating down the doors, shattering the bars, inspecting the prison-cells, passing with horror through all the unknown and impenetrable regions of that dreadful maze, and searching for captives to set at liberty, others, entirely caught up in their triumph, loaded with trophies and abundant plunder, made haste to announce abroad the Herculean exploits, the glory, the momentous achievement of the day, or else, gathering round their captives and shielding them from popular wrath, went forth slowly in solemn procession.

The Rue Saint-Antoine, debouching upon the Grève, became the thoroughfare by which all emerging from the Bastille flowed out, for the victors, eager to sanctify their plunder, meant to place it at the feet of the Electors convened in the Town Hall, and to bring the vanquished before that popular seat of judgement.

Yet at various points upon the way, most of these hapless souls were struck down by a crazed and furious crowd. One shudders to speak of it, yet there are ever present, upon all occasions, cowardly rascals and cut-throats perfectly willing to

butcher the weaponless, perfectly willing to make an end of those betrayed by luck. At the approaches to the arcade of Saint-Jean, notwithstanding the marvels of courage displayed in his defence by the Marquis de Pelleport,[5] to whom this gallant fellow had been a comforter throughout five years of imprisonment, the fortress major was hacked to bits; and as he placed his foot upon the perron of the Town Hall, the governor[6] met a treacherous death at murderous hands, his corpse, pierced through with countless wounds and mangled in every part, being abandoned to the brutalities of a degraded and ferocious scum. This gallant soul fought back for several minutes with leonine fury! No man of spirit ever met his end with more courage! It was a dreadful spectacle! If but ten men of that quality had borne themselves likewise in the Bastille, the Bastille could never have been seized! But it was not within the counsels of Heaven.

Urged by an instinctive curiosity, by a hunger for destruction and revenge, the mob surged without pause into the Bastille. Each wished to deal the craven's stroke. All desired to look right in the face of that bugbear which had for so long a time been the object of collective horror and the grovelling menial of tyranny and the hangman. Men knew a curious delight in passing at will beneath those secret vaultings where never heretofore had the footstep of a free soul made itself heard.

Not one corner, not one concealed spot, not one wretched hole escaped the searching curiosity and rapacity of the multitude. Some days past, an aged man who, child though he was at the time, took vigorous part in the assault, told me he remembers with perfect distinctness a large chamber of oval shape, the entrance of which had been blocked off and into which he had managed to slip among the very first, the whole sheathed in black panelling, decorated with painted scenes depicting torments, and round whose walls, on every side, massive iron hooks were set into the masonry. Upon one of these hooks, he swore to me, there was hanging by the back of the neck a human skeleton that could only have been hung up there whilst yet alive. But doubtless it had been there a very long time indeed, since nothing clung to the bones but some remnants of dress; all else, decayed and all but turned to powder, lay fallen beneath upon the paving stones, together with a knight's cross of Saint-Louis.[7] Who might this man have been? What crime had he committed? Who gave orders for this monstrous deed? No one knows! The eye of God alone can follow tyranny into its deepest and most impenetrable retreats.

The same aged man likewise told me, with considerable good humour, that having been the first to wriggle through, by virtue of his slender proportions, via a peephole or kind of slit into the armoury, he had instinctively made haste to grab,

not some serviceable musket, but rather, on account of its strangeness, a kind of cudgel or iron skull-cracker. Towards seven that evening, as he made his way back to his mother's house with a warrior's gait, bearing his weapon upon his shoulder, a patrol of the citizen guard unfortunately crossed his path at the corner of the Rue Caumartin.

In a harsh voice the corporal enquired whence he was coming, and how he came to be carrying such an arm.

"I come from the Bastille," he answered in a lofty manner; "I am one of the victors! Done for are our tyrants and that last shelter of despotism! As to this weapon, I won it with my own hands, at peril of my life; it is the prize of our triumph, it is my booty, mine alone!"

"I was just warming to my theme and ready to go on at much greater length," added my aged informant, "when the corporal, cutting my rhapsody short, snatched away my skull-cracker, and styling me a young scamp, dealt me such a kick as would have caught me square in the belly had I not managed to turn myself about."

"Such, alas!" he went on, "were all the civic distinctions conferred upon me! Such was the sum total of lucre I reaped from victory."

If he yet lived in our day, would you not agree that Aesop could turn this young patriot's minor escapade into a thoroughly good moral tale?

But to return to the Bastille. From the Well Tower or the Liberty Tower — I cannot now say exactly which — there came all at once the sound of moaning. People bent to listen. The sounds seemed to be rising from far down in some subterranean cell. Horror spread abroad, then horror yielded to righteous fury. They smashed in the cell doors, and by the faint light coming through a slit in the wall, there was seen, hunched in a corner, a skeletal figure that entreated them for bread.

The tumult which had reigned within the fortress had kept the gaolers from seeing to their captives, and from the preceding evening onward they had remained unfed.

Witnessing this, all stepped backward at once; then in place of consternation came tears. They took the unfortunate man gently in hand and brought him forth into the open court. There, in the bright light of day, amid cries both of terror and of pity, they saw a human form all but unclothed, of appalling gauntness, able only with difficulty to stand upon his dried and wasted legs, his head buried beneath flowing white hair. A prodigious beard fell to the centre of his frame. Upon his chest, of which one could number every rib, there hung a black crucifix. The nails on his hands and feet

exceeded in length the claws of any wild beast. But without appearing either touched or amazed by what passed around him, his gaze vitreous and vacant, the ghostly figure stood unmoving.

Exultant in their prize, in living proof of tyranny, the people at once contrived a makeshift platform from shattered furniture and trees uprooted from the governor's pleasure-grounds. Upon this they placed the wretched prisoner; then, this makeshift throne lifted high and borne on the shoulders of victors who had garbed themselves derisively in the golden vestments of the Comte de Sade,[8] armed with or burdened by strange and outlandish instruments seized from the Chamber of Torture, carrying ancient colours or mere tatters at the tips of their lances, they clustered thickly round; and then, reeling with joy and self-satisfaction, this macabre and absurd cavalcade heaved into motion, set forth on its journey, descended from the Bastille through storms of applause and shouting, and went abroad scattering in its wake wonder, dread, and fervent enthusiasm.

"How long is it since you were imprisoned?" was shouted at the apparition from every side.

"For what cause were you taken?"

"Who are you? What is your name?"

Yet Patrick, ever mournful and without reaction, with head bowed down and hidden under his beard and locks, held to an unbreakable silence.

[1] *Turenne and Condé:* Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne, Vicomte de Turenne (1611–1675), and Louis II de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, known as the Great Condé (1621–1686), were the two supreme military commanders of seventeenth-century France; both distinguished themselves in the Thirty Years' War, (1618-1648), that vast and devastating conflict which engulfed much of Europe in religious and dynastic struggle, and later in the wars of territorial expansion waged by Louis XIV throughout his long reign. Both played prominent, though shifting and at times opposing, roles during the tumultuous civil conflicts of the Fronde (1648-1653), a series of aristocratic and popular uprisings against the Crown during Louis XIV's minority, when noble factions and the Parlement of Paris challenged royal authority.

[2] *Camisado*: a surprise night attack, in which soldiers wore their shirts (*camisa*) over their armour to identify themselves in the darkness; a term from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century warfare still in use as a military archaism in Borel's day.

[3] *Monsieur Thuriot:* Jacques-Alexis Thuriot de la Rosière (1753–1829) was a revolutionary lawyer who managed the rare feat

of surviving the Terror he helped create. Present at the storming of the Bastille as a negotiator, he rose through the Convention as one of its more radical voices — a man who considered Robespierre a moderate — before serving on the Committee of Public Safety. His finest hour came on 9 Thermidor, when, presiding over the Convention in the absence of the regular president, he simply refused to give Robespierre the floor, a procedural act that sealed the Incorruptible's fate. Of Robespierre's behaviour at the Festival of the Supreme Being, Thuriot had already remarked with characteristic bluntness: "Look at the bugger; it's not enough for him to be master, he has to be God." He survived the reaction, adapted to the Empire, and died in exile in Liège — ironically enough, banished by the Bourbon Restoration as a regicide.

[4] *The Tower of the Comté and the Bazinière*: two of the eight towers comprising the Bastille fortress, each bearing a historical name; the Tower of the Comté was associated with prisoners of high rank, the Bazinière with those held at the discretion of the lieutenant of police.

[5] *The Marquis de Pelleport:* Anne-Gédéon de La Fitte de Pelleport (1754–1807) was one of those characteristic figures of the late eighteenth century who drifted between literature, libertinism, espionage and sheer survival without ever quite settling into any of them. Trained at the École Militaire, he deserted his regiment for an actress, ran up debts across Europe, gravitated to the underground press in London and

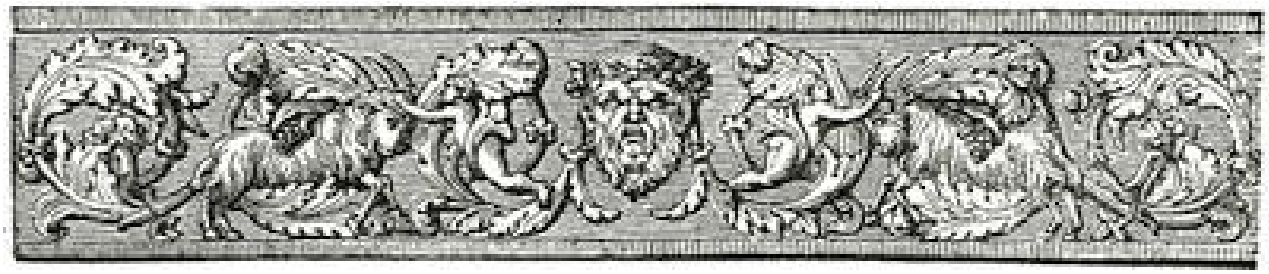
Neuchâtel, and spent over four years in the Bastille — his neighbour at one point being the Marquis de Sade — for a pamphlet savaging the French court. The Revolution barely improved his fortunes: he served successively as a diplomatic agent of the Convention, a prisoner of the Austrians, a British spy in Hamburg, and a manufacturer of sealing-wax in Bremen. Brissot, who knew him well, described him as a kind of Alcibiades — brilliant, unscrupulous, and willing to play any role asked of him. He ended his days as a cadastral surveyor in Liège, having outlived three regimes and most of his principles.

[6] *The governor*: Bernard-René de Launay (1740–1789), governor of the Bastille, who surrendered the fortress after the inner drawbridge fell; he was seized by the crowd, subjected to repeated attempts at lynching, and finally killed near the Hôtel de Ville.

[7] *A knight's cross of Saint-Louis*: the Ordre Royal et Militaire de Saint-Louis, founded by Louis XIV in 1693, awarded to distinguished officers of the French army; its presence among the skeleton's remains suggests a senior military officer — one of the many prisoners whose identity and fate were never established.

[8] *The golden vestments of the Comte de Sade*: consistent with the detail established earlier in the novel that the Marquis de Sade's wardrobe ran to upwards of two hundred magnificently embroidered coats; when he was transferred from Vincennes to the Bastille in 1784, his possessions

accompanied him. The sardonic image of victors of the Revolution parading Patrick in the finery of the Marquis de Sade is one of Borel's most characteristic strokes.



XXIX.

The more headlong became the rush of the horse that was bearing Vengeance's corpse, the fiercer waxed its terror, and the more fearful and more erratic its running; the head, abandoned to its weight, tumbled about the crupper and knocked against it; the legs, slack and inert, hanging right and left, going and coming like stirrups without riders, smote the animal's sides; and all this spurring the poor beast unrelentingly, as might a merciless breaker, fear drumming in its skull, anguish seizing its heart, moisture darkening its coat, it plunged ahead, it leapt across as if they were nothing but ditches, as if they were the ravines torn by torrents, whole lengths of steady ground; one instant, like a knife snapped open along its whole length and flung at a foeman's breast, it appeared to sail above the soil, the next it razed the very earth like a reaping-hook. No longer could one speak of fleetness — this was frenzy!

Shake free of the fright that leads you astray, O faithful and generous steed! This blackness — see you not that it is no more than night? night, that respite from the burning ague which men term day! That which weighs upon your back — see you not that it is the boy who was your master, he who grew beside you from the beginning, made by death into nothing more than a mindless weight? Woe and misery! from that head lolling upon your flanks, jolted by your motion as though it were a thing severed and tied to the arçon,[1] there will never again sound that loved voice which caused you to tremble as trembles one at the note of the bugle! Oh, I beseech you! wherefore such headlong flight, trusty and high-bred horse? what power drives you on? Speed away — yet know that the close of this desperate run shall be attained too early by half! It is not your lot to carry, as did the steed whereon was fastened in days gone by the handsome page to the King of Poland, some hetman riding to the Ukraine! You are no such key as might be sent to unbar the radiant realm of what is yet to be! A vessel passing from some blighted strand toward the shores that face the dawn! It is not Mazeppa[2] you carry, I tell you, but a lifeless thing! Not the fate of a people do you bear, but a single fate cloven asunder! Not toward any seat of power do you race, but toward the place of the dead! Toward the tomb! Senseless wretch that I am — yet what throne more enviable than that! Oh! make speed! make speed, you noble-hearted steed! The chaplet of poppies wherewith

death adorns us is the most blessed of crowns, and the most blessed of kingdoms is the sleeping silence of the grave! Ah, make haste! make haste! Of a surety death's kingdom is the most benign, since for its sake we one and all relinquish our lives; and what mortal ever set eyes upon one who fled from death and lived to tell the tale!

The night's blackness gave cover to this frantic gallop, but there came no raven to suspend itself above the charger and gyrate like a candle-moth about a burning light; not one pack of howling wolves, their far-off ululations filling the night, gave furious chase behind it; nor did any deserts of sand, any cheerless lonely places, any steppes with their twisted shrubs stretch themselves beneath its flying feet. It had covered no more than some few versts[3] of worked land, of productive fields, when before long it came, by what fortune who can say, to the verge of the great forest of Saint-Germain, and thence, taking its direction as would a practised helmsman, it struck out in the direction of the Triel uplands. Scaling the hill's flank, then, as swiftly as any izard[4] might, and arriving upon the high plateau, it finally drew up with tremendous clamour before the gateway of the Évêquemont domain.

In that spot, with its neck thrust out and its head arched back like an affrighted swan that bats its wings and rattles its beak at the sight of a buzzard poised above its nestlings, its

nostrils pushed tight against the grille's bars, stamping and shifting about with tremendous vigour, scoring the ground beneath, it set to neighing much as a wayfarer by night will shout and hammer at the door of some country inn. At the sound the mastiffs on guard, shaken from their rest, leapt as far as their chains would permit and met the horse's cries with a chorus of barking such as would wake the dead. Such was the racket, so tremendous the noise, that it seemed as though in the upper air some demon huntsman was flying past.

Deborah was still keeping watch when all this occurred. Bent in sorrow upon the rail of her casement, she gave ear to the stillness of the night as though it were a symphony demanding her closest heed. The faintest stirring of the foliage, the softest whisper of the breeze, would cause her to tremble, for she imagined in such sounds a token that her boy was returning — he who, heartless creature, delayed so long to come home! Every rustle and every sigh that the darkness brought seemed to her to carry his approach, to carry the pounding beat of his horse in full career. Following the intimate disclosures of the night before, how could the vanishing of Vengeance and the fact that his arms were gone fail to provoke the liveliest concern, fail to awaken the most piercing dread? Furthermore, the little message Vengeance had penned and placed on the table before leaving was hardly calculated to set Deborah's mind at rest, since it bore nothing

but these enigmatic words: "Rest easy, mother — I will be back." Whenever certain random queries Vengeance had made of her gathered themselves into a single mass within her thoughts, she felt she could half-perceive what was afoot, that matters began to grow clear: in those moments her terror became insupportable; she wept bitterly; and on occasion, trembling in the manner of a coward who feels the axe poised above his neck, she would sink down upon her knees and, raising both arms toward the heavens, would cry aloud in a voice broken by grief:

"O my God!" came her anguished cry. "You who are a God of justice, guard my boy! guard my son! O my God, do not ask of me a sacrifice greater than I can bear!"

Thus, the moment she caught the sound of hooves and the whinnying of a horse, never questioning but that her adored boy was coming home, giving thanks to God for giving him back to her, and hastening forth to welcome him, she had whispered to herself: "He returns victorious!"

The castle servants raced ahead with torches held high, for within those walls all the domestics had been afflicted with the same dread as Deborah and would accept no sleep until their youthful master was safely home; and by the moment Deborah gained the entrance, the men on guard had already set it ajar. Yet then there came a shock most fearful! In place of the boy she had pictured — drunk with triumph,

riding home in pride with the severed head of his foe swinging from his hand — discovering nothing but a lifeless body trussed up and drenched in gore, her heart broke utterly, and she hurled herself down upon the stones, her voice torn with hideous weeping.

The guards having made haste to cut the bindings with their swords, the body of Vengeance was at once borne into his mother's room — and there the spectacle grew even more harrowing, this wretched woman searching to find some lingering trace of life-heat in a dead body, wrenching aside the garments that hid the fatal injury, moving her lips and her tears over every inch of him!

When hope was at last forbidden her, when she had seen beyond all question that he was dead, when she had pressed her finger down into the opening in his chest, a deadly chill gripping her of a sudden:

"O my God!" she gasped, in a swoon of horror. "Was this tiny grain of wheat so necessary to fill your measure full!" "They have slain my boy! You have slain my boy, O Lord! O Lord, how merciless You show Yourself!"

[1] *Arçon*: the pommel or cantle of a saddle — the raised front or rear bow between which the rider sits; a technical term of horsemanship used here with precise, terrible effect.

[2] *Mazeppa*: Ivan Mazepa (c. 1639–1709), Hetman of the Ukrainian Cossacks, whose legendary punishment — bound naked to a wild horse as a young man, surviving the ordeal, and eventually rising to rule his people — became one of the great Romantic myths of the early nineteenth century, celebrated in poems by Byron (1819) and Hugo (1829) and a symphonic poem by Liszt (1851). Borel here deliberately inverts the myth: Vengeance's horse carries not a living man toward future greatness but a dead boy toward an empty tomb.

[3] *Versts*: a Russian unit of length, approximately 1.07 kilometres; its use here, along with "steppes," gives the apostrophe a deliberately pan-European Romantic colouration, placing this gallop in the same vast landscape as the Mazeppa legend.

[4] *Izard*: the Pyrenean chamois (*Rupicapra pyrenaica*), a goat-antelope celebrated for the sureness and swiftness of its movement across steep rocky terrain.

XXX.

After weeping most bitterly over the body of her boy, Deborah gave orders that it should be taken to the cenotaph that stood upon the greensward. How sad a thing! to have watched him kneeling on that marble stone intended one day to hold his father's body — for every day Vengeance would come to pray there — who would have imagined that the hapless youth was kneeling upon what would become his own grave? Just as she had shed unceasing tears over the corpse, so Deborah wept without pause over the tomb at first; then her dolour, having inch by inch carved itself a bed both deep and close-pressed, no longer spilled over its banks, but flowed on soundlessly under thickly clustering alders, under brakes of briar and rush, in secrecy and in the shadows. But however much more deeply buried, however much more closely held within, the sorrow that possessed this luckless woman had lost nothing whatsoever of its intensity or its terrible truth. There was no

gauge by which to reckon her loss. Hers was one of those griefs that time can never erase. No lapse of days could compensate for such a loss. The world, that dismal city peopled by those who exist no longer and those destined to cease existing, with its forgetful nature and its heedless, chattering head, had no part to play in this. Indeed, what had the world to do with this cloistered place, this shelter of a mighty woe! The humming of it could but faintly be heard, and then only at the very foot of the walls themselves.

There was an end of it! The poor widow's life had been laid waste anew, laid waste never to be rebuilt. What hope she had retained was now destroyed past mending. The faintest and most distant glimmer of happiness, even in the mind's eye, could no longer show itself to her failing vision. Whose hand might now wipe the tears from her cheeks? Which way could she incline without encountering a chasm? Though to all outward seeming she still held some claim upon existence, and had not yet reached the end of her earthly course, though no sexton had yet let her down into the pit, she was dwelling no less surely underground with her two departed ones. She existed no more, dead with those for whom her heart had beaten, for whom it had ever beaten, dead with Patrick, dead with Vengeance, with the husband of her youth and the son of her womb, dead and nailed into the same narrow box!

Throughout the days following upon that disastrous affair, rising from the very depths of her sorrow, Deborah set in motion with tremendous resolve the most active and ingenious investigations to uncover the merciless murderer who had slain her boy. These exertions, however, came to nothing, yielding no more fruit than had her earlier attempts in the matter of Patrick. The veil of darkness that had shrouded the father's doubtful end descended equally upon the tragic fate of the son. "Then it was foreordained," murmured Deborah in the secrecy of her heart, "that these two precious souls should be wrested from me by a hand more unseen than the wind which blows by and sweeps the leaf along! and that not even the poor relief of having some enemy of flesh and blood — one upon whom I might discharge my anger and my hate — should be mine!"

As scarcely a handful of hours lay between the instant when Vengeance was murdered and those confessions he had torn from his mother regarding bygone days and the root of all their ills, Deborah could not for one moment doubt — so headstrong and so savage had he shown himself on that final occasion — that he had gone to throw down the gauntlet before one of their tormentors; and among such persons he could hardly have singled out any save Monsieur de Villepastour, or the heirs of Pharaoh, or Madame Putiphar herself. Of all these, Villepastour was the one who bore the

most credible burden of suspicion. It was in relation to him that the idea appeared most plausible. Hence it was especially about him and aimed at him that the most dogged investigations were pressed. Yet impossible it remained, despite all the stubbornness that could be mustered, to lay hands on a shred of credible proof. Icolm-Kill went to see the fellow nonetheless, intending to gauge the ground under his tread, intending to set his own settled conviction beside the face — too cunning by far, worse luck — of the old court intriguer.

When the devoted steward put it to the Marquis whether he had by any chance seen a young man of a particular sort, one who had perhaps arrived to provoke some senseless dispute with him, the Marquise, who was present in the drawing-room seated at her keyboard instrument, subsided quietly in a faint; yet Villepastour answered with perfect composure that he had no notion what the fellow was talking about. Presently, recollecting of a sudden who this fellow was, he turned him out in no gentle fashion.

"Fifteen years back, sir," he said, "you came to my door — my memory of you is exact — to press upon me questions concerning some fellow named Patrick who had been cashiered from the Musketeers; and here you are today demanding I answer for a child! What do you hope to achieve, sir? The business you are about I cannot fathom!"

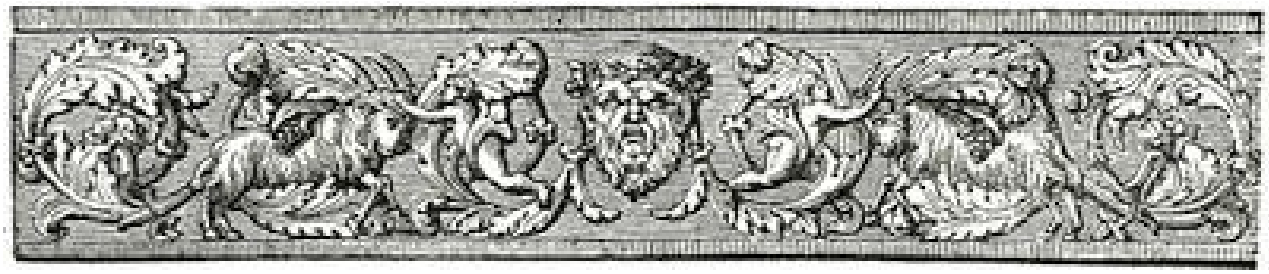
Once more Icolm-Kill had no choice but to choke down his rage and bend his head low. Possessing no proof of what he had come to believe, he dared not give vent to his feelings. To condemn a man on the strength of surface impressions, he had not the requisite nerve — he was not so dread a judge as the case required.

There were moments when Deborah would all at once hold herself responsible for her son's untimely end. Her grief was such that she longed to assume the full blame for what had been lost. "Why on earth," she thought, "did I encourage in that boy's green understanding those perilous virtues — courage and the love of honour! Woe is me! had I only raised him as a meek and timid thing, he would be with me still, he would still be here to feel my embrace! All significance has been struck from my life, and struck for ever! It was my doing, mine in my folly, to place the steel in his young hand — mine to send him to the butchery! Why, O weak and senseless heart of mine, did I consent to his petitions when they ought to have filled me with nothing save horror!"

But presently, recovering the essential truth of her nature and her masculine fortitude:

"No, no!" she cried aloud. "You were right to do as you did, Vengeance. Luck played you false — luck was at fault, not you! Sleep well! I am at peace, you cannot but have died the death of the brave! Go in peace! I regret nothing, since you

died young enough to die untainted, without ever being plunged into the filth of this world! Your death is my destruction; your death has borne off all that gave me life! I shall be crushed by my sorrow, but it is a glorious sorrow — what does the rest signify! They shall not say, whatever else is said, that from my womb came a race of cowards."



XXXI.

Within the twofold isolation of her dwelling-place and of her breast, each as shut fast and as barren as its fellow, Deborah kept herself unalterably cloistered ever since her son's assassination. The ending of her torture she awaited in restless eagerness. Hers was the pitiable condition of one who would gladly have done with life, but whom a righteous dread of the Almighty restrains from laying violent hands upon herself. The gloom of her daily life, her sorrow, her black despair, had inflicted upon her physical being the same ruin they had brought to her inward self. Not that she had become unsightly — rather, she no longer possessed that flawless and surpassing beauty which in former days had set her apart from every living creature. Gone was the haughty warrior-woman! gone the very Penthesilea[1] she had been! White as death, slow in her movements, abstracted in mind, and leaning forward as she went, she had cheeks that were drawn and haggard, and a

look of complete desolation. Her speech, turned hollow and confused, gave the impression of coming forth from between the stones of some burial chamber. She was like one diseased or like a spectre, retaining nothing but the ghastly sheen of a marble sculpture or of some agate urn.

Now Icolm-Kill, who still kept alive some residue of those seditious proclivities which had in former times embroiled him in countless adventures and afflictions, did not for his part dwell in so stern a retirement as did Deborah. Every so often he took an interest in the world beyond and in its controversies. The Parliamentary quarrels had given him no small degree of interest; yet it must be said that he had not immersed himself greatly in the public commotions of the age, nor did he regard them with any profound solicitude — for the Bastille had lain in popular hands for well-nigh a month before anyone at the manor of Évêquemont had heard tell of it.

Then at last, one morning, with a manner that betokened some strange and ferocious pleasure, Icolm-Kill came rushing to find Deborah where she prayed at the base of the lawn sepulchre, and there, waving aloft a *Gazette*:

"O my lady!" he burst out. "While we exist here in so deep a peace, France is caught up in the most violent disorder! We stand, so it seems, upon the very brink of a revolution that bids fair to be frightful and gory! Paris is at

this instant in the grip of appalling anarchy. The people, in revolt and crying vengeance, march death from street to street. See here! Look at this! There is something here which, I rather think, has to do with us!"

"Owing to the haste with which we compiled our account," he was reading, "we omitted to record, amid that profusion of glorious happenings which have marked out each moment of this deathless week — which shall, through all the ages and until the last trumpet sounds, remain the astonishment and glory of our children's children — certain episodes of such importance that we cannot in conscience suppress them longer.

"In the course of that day, the great and never-to-be-forgotten day of the fourteenth, there occurred, amongst many such happenings, the following: as he was quitting Paris in a species of travelling coach, disguised in the garb of a footman, his wife beside him dressed as some itinerant seamstress, his countenance bearing that pallid and ghastly look peculiar to cowards in the grip of terror, a scorner of the people, a base-born aristocrat, the Marquis de Gave de Villepastour, erstwhile captain-colonel of the late King's Musketeers, and celebrated far and wide for his insulting behaviour toward the worthiest class of our fellow-citizens — whom he was pleased to term the *canaille*[2] — was taken into custody, and, being found in possession of documents that

seemed to implicate him in treasonable designs, was conducted by certain brave patriots and soldiers of the nation to the Hôtel-de-Ville. There, at the very instant he was passing from the quay out onto the open strand, the people, animated by that innate wisdom which never deserts them, surged forward against the vehicle of this privileged minion of tyranny, upset it and set it ablaze there and then. As concerns the Marquis, as one might well suppose, his account was settled quickly and conclusively; in the blinking of an eye he was pulled from his seat, hung from that now-famous lantern-post which has become such a celebrated gibbet, then cut down and handed over to the frenzy of those men of valour — whom certain voices try vainly to dishonour by terming them Cannibals — who opened up his belly, ripped the heart from his chest, struck off his head and hoisted it upon a pike, in order that this sublime example should carry to every corner a salutary dread into the stony hearts of tyrants and traitors among us!"

"Almighty God!" cried out Deborah thereupon, burying her face in her hands and shivering with shock and fright. "O God above, how dreadful is the people's justice!"

[1] *Penthesilea*: in Greek mythology, the Queen of the Amazons and daughter of Ares, who led her warriors to the defence of Troy after Hector's death; she was killed in single combat by Achilles, who, according to some versions, fell in love with her at the moment of her death. She became in later tradition the supreme emblem of the warrior-woman, beautiful and fierce in equal measure.

[2] *Canaille*: French, "rabble" or "riffraff" — a term of aristocratic contempt for the common people, whose political resonance in 1789 was incendiary.

XXXII.

"But here is a matter that affects us even more deeply, madam, and I cannot find the words to break it to you! I tremble lest I unleash in your heart all at the same instant feelings both too overwhelming and too wildly opposed to one another. On the selfsame day which saw Monsieur le Marquis de Gave de Villepastour perish so savagely, there was discovered — the matter is certain, by all accounts — in the nethermost depths of a dungeon, inside the Bastille, once the rebels had taken possession of it and put the traitorous defenders to the sword, a prisoner — ghastly vision! — overgrown with lengthy locks and a lengthy beard, with nails grown out like a lion's claws, and reduced through his sufferings to little more than a living skeleton. The common folk, dizzy with the wine of victory, led this hapless being in procession through every quarter of the town for several days, showing him forth in every public square as incontestable proof of the evils wrought by an order of

society that must cease to exist for evermore! Now! this man, my lady! Oh, I hardly dare utter it! Yet, it cannot but be someone beloved by you, someone you think lies buried in the earth, a man, my lady, whom we sought with all our might, yet never found — so profound are the lightless pits of tyranny! Do you perceive, sad to say, madam, who this hapless being could possibly be? Oh, I beg you help me — I cannot single-handedly bury in your bosom at once both such a dagger-stroke and such bliss!"

Yet Deborah, reeling beneath the force of a feeling too overwhelming, stood frozen in that place, staring vacantly before her, powerless to speak.

"Now, madam, this man, this hapless being — it is he himself! it is your ill-fated spouse! there can be no question of it!"

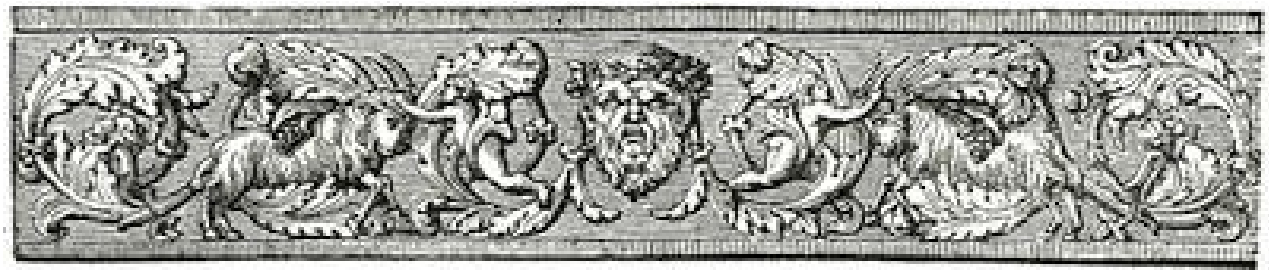
"Patrick!" breathed Deborah, overwhelmed altogether by the most profound and agonising shock.

"Aye, madam, Patrick! See here, read this! The man gives his name as Whyte, or Fitz-Whyte, or sometimes Phadruig. No one has the least notion who he may be, nor how long he had been kept in that hellish pit. No intelligence could be gained from the man himself. Nevertheless, since he has excellent command of English and speaks in addition some

other unrecognised tongue, all the indications are, they say, that he is Irish-born."

Deborah could contain herself no more! In the upheaval that was the death of her, falling to her knees, her arms flung toward the sky, midst sobs and cries of joyous laughter:

"Thanks be, O God above!" she cried aloud. "Thanks to You who deign at last to give him back to me! Patrick! Patrick, O my own Patrick! Who would have dreamed I was destined to look upon you again!"



XXXIII.

Barely had Deborah come to herself a bit after that initial tumult than she burned to be gone with frightful haste. The thought that the man for whom she had mourned so bitterly, whose mortal remains and burial place she had hunted for so many years without success, might yet be walking upon the earth — this thought, I tell you, crushed her, engulfed her, intoxicated her past all reason!

"Speed, speed!" she thought to herself. "My poor beloved must be in desperate want of my coming to dry away his tears! Quick, quick, for he is the unhappier one just now. I know we are to be restored to one another and meet again, but he — poor soul — knows nothing of it! It may be that he, for his part, is even now searching for my grave just as I searched for so many years for his!"

Returned to the energy that had once been hers, Deborah did not waver for any length of time, and, refusing to squander such precious hours in making ready, she commanded that her two finest horses be put at once to the plainest carriage she possessed. Then, wearing the plain habit of a countrywoman so as not to provoke resentful stares, with none but Icolm-Kill beside her, she took to the road without a moment's delay.

Yet her fervent mind was racing more swiftly still about its own pivot than the wheel of the vehicle that swept her onward. Her heart hammered with anxiety more wildly than the heaving flanks of her mettlesome horses that rent the air asunder and made nothing of the intervening ground.

It was a great many years since Deborah had last walked the city's streets, and since that last occasion Paris had altered so completely that, were it not for a few great buildings which stand there for ever like the seal on a deed to vouch for its genuineness, she would have been hard put to recognise it at all. In place of the Paris of old she had expected to find — vivacious, fashionable, charming, affluent, wasteful of beauties and riches — she made her entry through a fire-blackened tollgate into a dismal, purposeless hamlet that bore the wild-eyed and hangdog look of some stray cur casting about for a new master. You would have thought a pestilence had just struck the city and was ruling over it. Houses stood

apparently untenanted, streets lay wholly unpeopled. Gates and casements stood firmly barred in all quarters. Where formerly one saw resplendent dress bedecked with bullion and gold leaf, where formerly one encountered free-and-easy, blooming, good-humoured faces — now rags and physiognomies either morose or fit for the scaffold; waves of cockades and banners red and blue; and scattered about, some members of the civic guard and townsfolk awkwardly got up and ill-instructed in the handling of arms, each regarding the other as though they would eat each other alive. For all that, nothing whatsoever had truly changed — where did this forbidding aspect come from, then? Had some alien power conquered the place? Had Israel been brought in chains to Nineveh or to Babylon? Had Egypt been smitten with seven plagues? No, no, not so! Simply this: the rod of God's virtue had beaten the waters of the social pond, and the slime of the bottom had come bubbling to the surface!

Icolm-Kill applied himself persistently to every sort of people's official who had set himself up since the uprising, and who was attempting, poor creature, to carry water in a basket. Yet not a single one of these freshly minted beings was able to provide him the least scrap of intelligence. Each and every one had been entirely cognisant of the prisoner Icolm-Kill was enquiring after, but none had any notion what had become of him by that time. Already Deborah was

starting to rue having put such ready faith in something so nebulous and, one might say, impossible. She had already ground her hope beneath her heel and moistened her lips anew with gall, when an Elector — Monsieur Éthis de Corny,[1] I think his name was — declaring himself to be in full possession of the facts, gave them the firm assurance that the luckless man they were after, having been for several days the darling of all Paris and having stirred in every breast the profoundest pity and the fiercest hatred of despotism, had in all likelihood been removed — though for what particular reason he could not say with certainty — to Charenton.[2]

Such was the extremity of her joy and her gratitude that Deborah showered the Elector's hands with kisses, wished him a tranquil and lengthy span of years, and left forthwith for the establishment that sheltered her beloved and whence he should finally be returned to her.

As she made her way up the Rue Saint-Antoine, Deborah heard the roar of cannon and volley after volley of musket-fire; presently, observing a vast throng crowding about the Bastille, which stood all but completely razed, she felt a sudden stab of terror, supposing that the populace had come to blows and that she was on the point of beholding some spectacle of carnage. But the silence and the orderly conduct, and the deference manifest upon each visage, quickly set her mind at ease. She pursued her path with courage, and it was

not long before she grasped that nothing more than funeral obsequies with military honours were being performed. From amid the rubble of the fearful fortress, eight hundred labourers engaged in pulling it down, joined now by representatives from several quarters of the city and some officers of the Revolution, came forth in ceremonial file, all with uncovered heads, all with picks upon their shoulders, all looking grave and profoundly affected. In the vanguard, four of these working-men carried upon a board the skeletal remains of two human beings, from which there still dangled chains and an enormous ball of iron. The remnants of these two victims of the most monstrous inhumanity ever to have thriven upon the face of the earth had been come upon by those pulling down the walls, entombed in a bed of quicklime and mortar underneath certain steps in the stairway of a tower; and prompted by a noble surge of feeling, by that fellow-feeling which is seldom entirely absent from the human heart, the people had resolved to bestow a public token of sympathy upon the departed souls of these two captives, innocent beyond doubt, who had fallen, perhaps many centuries past, under the furtive blows of a tyranny at once pusillanimous and steeped in darkness — to perform the last offices for them and bear them with ceremony to a place where they might rest.

It is beyond dispute, it admits of no uncertainty, that secret executions once took place within the Bastille. A number of other skeletal remains were found there too; and furthermore, were there not discovered dry cesspits filled with human detritus, with bones and the very dust of bones!

The scene of this dismal rite, and the realisation that she and Patrick had stood so perilously close to the destiny of these two prisoners, who might well have been walled up living in the depths of some dungeon, tore Deborah's heart apart with savage force and completed her descent into the most distressing tumult of feeling.

Deeply sad and deeply thoughtful, crushed by the fatigue of travelling, beaten down under the exertions of the wildly varied emotions which had chased each other through her heart these few hours past, she arrived at last before the gates of the convent at Charenton. There, as she crossed over the threshold, dim yet terrible forebodings took violent possession of her spirit and drove forth the fragile hope that still struggled within it. Her limbs gave way with each pace she took, and all about her being proclaimed the extreme agitation of her mind.

Two brothers whom the external bell had brought hastened at once to receive her, and with kindness and civility of the most hospitable kind, escorted her to the reception chamber. Hardly did she have the power to gain a seat.

"What can be wrong, madam, that puts you in such dreadful suffering?" said one of the two brothers to her at that point — it was Brother Prudence, who governed the hospice — as he took her hand gently and made an effort to mellow his tones, which long practice in giving orders had rendered stern.

"Nothing, Father," said Deborah. "Only tiredness, a joy mingled with alarm, a deep-seated anxiety — though one which, God willing and with your help, I shall soon be quit of."

"Go on, madam."

"You ought to have in this place, reverend Father — of this we were most positively assured — since some time back, a few days it may be, a poor unfortunate man whom the people came upon in the dungeons of the Bastille, and whom, I beseech you in God's name, Father, I wish desperately to behold again? He is my spouse; his name is White or Patrick, and it is approaching seven-and-twenty years that misfortunes past all telling have kept us separated."

"That I cannot say, madam. Several new patients have been admitted here these last weeks, but we remain wholly ignorant as to their identities and where they have been brought from. Nevertheless, madam, if you believe yourself able to identify him, I shall have these last-come individuals

brought up from the catacombs, and if your husband should be found among them, have no fear, madam — you shall have him returned."

At that point Brother Prudence quietly gave a few commands.

"Catacombs, Father — what do you call catacombs?" Deborah resumed with a shiver, her blood having turned to ice at that dreadful term.

"That is our name, madam, within these walls, for the underground corridor where the iron cells are kept, those meant to hold the mad and violent residents. There, hark! The howling and the clanking of chains you are hearing this moment come straight from that appalling pit. It is a most sorrowful place to behold, and it is on that account, madam, that I shall spare your delicate feelings the horror of the spectacle."

Brother Prudence was just finishing his sentence when the second monk re-entered the hall in company with a man garbed in a coarse homespun coat, broad and short of stature, his face sunburnt and inflamed, his eye half-shut and vacant like some debauched Silenus.[3] The open light of day seemed to bewilder him completely. There emanated from him the foul smell of some feral creature.

At the sight of him, Deborah looked away.

"For the love of heaven, Father, remove this hideous thing from before me!" she cried out. "No, no, Father, this is not Patrick! Patrick, Father, is tall, handsome, dignified and proud!"

Two further individuals yet more degraded, creating a frightful racket, were subsequently led past her sight. Hardly did she venture to lift her eyes to look at them.

Finally, while she shuddered with impatience and horror combined, she suddenly saw coming toward her with dignified step a man virtually nude and of frightful leanness. Between the tangled mass of his hair and his beard, two large unwavering eyes blazed. A crucifix made of ebony and silver dangled against his chest.

For all the wretchedness and frightful state in which this man existed, there remained about his whole person a certain dignity and distinction which showed through and struck one instantly upon seeing him.

Seized by an inexpressible feeling, Deborah got abruptly to her feet and, without once letting her gaze stray from him, came to position herself before the ghostly form, where at length in a stance of wavering uncertainty, blended with doubt and horror, she scrutinised him as if she questioned whether this was a mortal creature or a spirit.

For some while already this dreadful and wordless scene had continued when, all at once catching sight upon the wasted finger of the phantom, held fast by a thread attached to the wrist, of the ring she had long ago given Patrick in the sight of heaven and nature upon the moors of Cockermouth Castle, Deborah cried out in a voice torn with grief:

"Can it be! It is you, my love! You, reduced to this! You, my own Patrick!"

And when she hurled herself upon him to cover him with her kisses and her tears, the man — preserving still that same impassivity and that same silence — thrust her from him, and so roughly that after reeling for a moment she collapsed upon her knees some paces removed.

For all the oppressive grief that was choking her and all her suffering, the unfortunate woman yet mustered within herself the power to exclaim anew, in accents still more piercing:

"But Patrick, can you not know me? I am Deborah! Your dearest friend! O my poor dear one! O my beloved! Can you truly not know this voice that cries to you and begs you! Patrick! Patrick! Patrick! Ah, what cruelty is this!"

Pulling herself across the floor to his feet, Deborah made yet a few more extremest efforts to have him know her, but all in vain! Patrick, ever unmoving, utterly heedless of all

that passed about him, turned his gaze upward to the vaulted ceiling and chanted remorselessly in a voice like one speaking from the tomb:

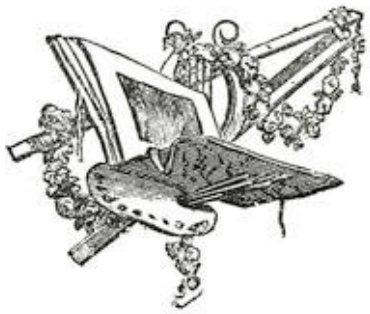
O thiarna, dean trocaire ormsa morpheacach.

"You witness it for yourself, madam," observed one of the religious then. "This hapless creature can neither know you nor reply to you. He is mad!"

"Mad!" Deborah echoed slowly, letting out a dreadful scream. It had not until then been within her power to conceive such a thing; the word struck her down as would a thunderclap. Suddenly collapsing inward upon herself with the swiftness of a blade sliding back into its scabbard, Deborah crumpled heavily to the earth, let out appalling sobs, and then a dreadful death-rattle.

Sorrow had slain her. She was no more!

But what complete vengeance was hers!



EPILOGUE.

At length my work is done. I stand at the close of this book which has caused me troubles exceeding even the effort it required, and which will undoubtedly cause me troubles vastly greater hereafter. The calamities, so very real and so great, which my pen — or I should say my heart — has found satisfaction in committing to these pages at such length, amount to nothing when set against the adventures and the well-nigh novelistic catastrophes that have dogged this work all along its path; it would make a fascinating project, the biography of this book.

To occupy ourselves with nothing but the tangible side of things, certain typesetting errors not attributable to me and certain oversights that are my fault have got past me in the correction of proofs, a circumstance I deeply regret. I trust no one will be so unkind as to lay these errata to my account

as proof of either malice or lack of knowledge on my part. I will admit that anyone attempting to wield these as weapons against me would make himself thoroughly absurd in the estimation of my friends, in the view of all who are acquainted with me or with my scholarly pursuits and my pretensions in that direction. As concerns myself, possessing as I do the means to take their measure, they would provoke in me no more than pity.

I am grateful to you, dear reader, for the interest you have been willing to bestow upon this gloomy tale throughout the space of roughly half a century, for the heed you have been generous enough to give me thus far. How very gracious of you. Such graciousness I shall remember always.

To you also I extend my earnest thanks, dear beautiful and sweet lady reader. You know me now to my depths; I have led you down into the most secret chambers of my heart; whether I have won your favour I know not, yet I know this — I love you dearly. Your charms and your kindly patience have so completely accustomed me to being in your company that, and I cannot pretend otherwise, it is with great heaviness of heart that I part from you.

Farewell, madam — I lay myself at your feet. I am grateful for your goodwill; I trust you will see fit to extend it to me still; I even bespeak it in advance for my coming book, to be entitled *Tabarin*.[4]

Until Tabarin, therefore!

Ah, if only, having listened to me, the public — that second Prince Hamlet — should find it in itself to tell me: "Be you welcome, sir, to Elsinore!"

END OF VOLUME TWO

AND LAST.

[1] *Monsieur Éthis de Corny:* Louis-Dominique Éthis de Corny (1736–1790), a Paris elector and avocat who played an active role in the events of 14 July 1789 and the days immediately following; he was among those who negotiated with the governor of the Bastille on the morning of the storming.

[2] *Charenton*: the convent and hospice of the Frères de la Charité at Charenton-Saint-Maurice, south-east of Paris, founded in 1645; it functioned as a lunatic asylum throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and is best known to literary history as the place where the Marquis de Sade spent his final years (1801–1814).

[3] *Silenus*: in Greek mythology, the elderly companion and foster-father of Dionysus, typically depicted as stout, red-faced, and perpetually drunk; he became in later usage a standard type for bloated, bleary dissipation.

[4] *Tabarin*: Tabarin was the street name of Anthoine Girard (c. 1584–1633), the most celebrated Parisian charlatan of his age, who for a decade held court in the Place Dauphine with his brother Philippe — the straight man to his clown — selling quack remedies from an improvised stage while keeping the

crowd entertained with bawdy improvised dialogue drawn from the commedia dell'arte tradition. His props were minimal but memorable: a wooden sword and a soft felt hat he could twist into a seemingly infinite variety of shapes to suit each character. Molière and La Fontaine both acknowledged his influence, and Boileau and Voltaire spoke well of him long after his death. The Girard brothers retired around 1628, bought a country estate near Orléans, and lived out their days as gentlemen — a trajectory that says something about how handsomely Parisian credulity could reward a sufficiently nimble wit.

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